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Vox regis

Royal Communication in High Medieval Norway

By

David Brégaint



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Trondheim, 24. June 2015

David Brégaint

Abbreviations

<i>Ágrip</i>	<i>Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum</i>
<i>Anecdoton</i>	<i>Anecdoton Sverreri</i>
<i>Asb</i>	<i>Árna saga biskups</i>
<i>Bs</i>	<i>Böglunga sögur</i>
<i>cc</i>	<i>Corpus codicum Norvegicorum medii aevi</i>
<i>Cc</i>	<i>Corpus juris canonici</i>
<i>CL</i>	<i>Chronicon de Lanercost</i>
<i>CM</i>	<i>Chronica Majora</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>De vita Caesarum</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>Diplomatarium Danicum</i>
<i>DK</i>	<i>Diplomata karolinorum</i>
<i>DN</i>	<i>Diplomatarium Norvegicum I–XX</i>
<i>F</i>	<i>Frostatinglova</i>
<i>Gks</i>	<i>Gottskalsk Annaler</i>
<i>HG</i>	<i>The Saga of Hákon the Good</i>
<i>HI</i>	<i>Herr Ivan</i>
<i>Historia</i>	<i>Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium</i>
<i>HN</i>	<i>Historia Norwegie</i>
<i>HO</i>	<i>Holtsmark</i> (En tale mot biskopene, “A speech against the bishops”)
<i>Hra</i>	<i>Historia rerum anglicarum</i>
<i>HsH</i>	<i>Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar</i>
<i>Hsk</i>	<i>Hirðskrá</i>
<i>IA</i>	<i>Islandske Annaler</i>
<i>Ísl</i>	<i>Íslendinga saga</i>
<i>Kgs</i>	<i>Konungs Skuggsía</i>
<i>KLNM</i>	<i>Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder I–XXI</i>
<i>Ks</i>	<i>Karlamagnus saga</i>
<i>LD</i>	<i>Latinske dokumenter</i> (ed. E. Vandvik)
<i>Lsb</i>	<i>Laurentius saga biskups</i>
<i>Lsp</i>	<i>Las Siete Partidas</i>
<i>ME</i>	<i>Magnus Erlingssons saga</i>
<i>MG</i>	<i>The saga of Magnus the Good</i>
<i>MLs</i>	<i>Magnúss saga Lagabætiss</i>
<i>NBL</i>	<i>Norsk Biografisk Leksikon</i>
<i>NCh</i>	<i>Norske Kongers Chronica</i>

<i>NgL</i>	<i>Norges gamle Love</i>
<i>NLH</i>	<i>Norsk Litteratur Historie</i>
<i>OFr</i>	Old French
<i>OH</i>	<i>The Saga of Olav Haraldsson (Heimskringla)</i>
<i>OK</i>	<i>The saga of Olaf Kyrre</i>
<i>ON</i>	Old Norse
<i>OV</i>	<i>Ordericus Vitalis</i>
<i>PO</i>	<i>Passio Olavii</i>
<i>Ps</i>	<i>Policraticus</i>
<i>RN</i>	<i>Regesta Norvegica</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>Saga of Sigurd the Crusader and His Brothers Eystein and Olaf</i>
<i>SH</i>	<i>The saga of Sigurd, Inge, and Eystein, the sons of Harald (Heimskringla)</i>
<i>Sts</i>	<i>Sturlunga saga</i>
<i>SvS</i>	<i>Sverris saga</i>
<i>The Speech</i>	<i>A Speech against the bishops</i>

Introduction

Norway's medieval state took shape in the 12th and 13th centuries. As elsewhere in Western Europe, Norway's high-medieval state was characterized by the rise of a strong and centralized hereditary monarchy established on an embryonic, yet burgeoning administrative apparatus capable of sustaining the extension of royal prerogatives in the domains of justice, taxation and physical coercion.¹ This centralized monarchy was also the basis for a concerted extension of the crown's central authority across the wider realm of Norway to include a number of peripheral tributary lands and consolidate what was the most geographically expansive polity in Western Europe at the time.²

The consolidation of royal authority was an arduous process which demanded new avenues for the distribution of power and entailed major upheavals in Norway's social hierarchy. The imposition of a royal fiscal system and the conception of royal jurisdiction often clashed with local powers' interests and traditional customs and not least with ecclesiastical prerogatives. Royal claims of monopoly over coercive means of power also chipped away at the autonomy of local and regional magnates and the popular institution of the *Leiðangr*, a levy of amateur warriors. The territorial unity of the kingdom and the expansion of the realm across the North Sea confounded existing divisions of loyalty at regional levels, reducing the power of local chieftains and princes. The challenges facing Norwegian kings were compounded by the fact that the founder of their eponymous dynasty, King Sverre, ascended the throne under dubious pretences of legitimacy at a time when monarchic principles

1 For a survey of the state-formation process in medieval Norway, see Knut Helle. 1964. *Norge blir en stat 1130–1319*. Universitetsforlaget; Knut Helle. 2003. "The Norwegian kingdom: succession disputes and consolidation." in K. Helle (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, Vol. I. Cambridge University Press: 369–391; Sverre Bagge. 2010a. *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom. State-Formation in Norway, c. 900–1350*, Museum Tusculanum Press; Sverre Bagge. 2012b. "Skandinavisk Statsdannelse." In Sverre Bagge *et al.* (red.) *Statsutvikling i Skandinavia i Middelalderen*. Oslo: Dreyers Forlag: 9–38. About state-formation in Europe, see the section about historiography.

2 At its apex (1266), the tributary provinces included Greenland, Iceland, the Orkneys, Shetland, the Faeroe Islands, Man and the Hebrides. For more information on the Realm of Norway and its dependencies see, Steinar Imsen. 2005. *Grenser og grannelag i Nordens historie*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag; Randi B. Wærdahl. 2011. *The Incorporation and Integration of the King's Tributary Lands into the Norwegian Realm c. 1195–1397*. Leiden: Brill; Steinar Imsen. (ed.) 2010. *The Norwegian Domination and the Norse World c. 1100–c. 1400*. Trondheim Studies in History.

prevalent in Western Europe were gaining ground and threatening to supplant the traditional Norwegian practice of shared kingship. The greatest challenge for the crown however was the acceptance of royal authority and power by the population and in particular by its elite.

The socio-political changes initiated by the process of state-formation could be enforced through war and the use of coercion. Indeed, the Norwegian civil war (1130–1240) with its conflicts of royal succession and armed confrontations between rival political factions has been considered a decisive factor in the concentration of power and authority in the hands of kings.³ In this bellicose context, kings could rely on the threat of physical force to induce subjects to pay taxes and submit to royal justice. However, while monarchs could claim a monopoly on legitimate violence, their resources and military power was insufficient for the enforcement of royal authority everywhere and at all times.⁴ Moreover, arbitrary spoliation and justice could prove counterproductive and generate resistance.

Cultivating the state required the enduring support and acquiescence of society that could only be achieved through more pacific, albeit no less relentless means. It is no coincidence that the genesis of the Norwegian state coincided not only with the development of new forms of ideological legitimization, but also with new ways of diffusing political messages. Despite being at the periphery of Europe, Norway was increasingly affected by the intellectual and cultural renaissance of the 12th century. Soon the rediscovery of ancient philosophy, law and science, the revival of Latin literature and the emergence of vernacular literature took root in Norwegian society's political culture.⁵ This influence became tangible in the development of a literary culture in Norway, transforming a society based on oral and exclusively elitist written communication into a proto-literate one, and stimulating the emergence of a

3 On the role of the civil war and warfare in the process of state-formation in Norway, see Sverre Bagge. 1986. "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i Middelalderen." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) 1986: 145–197, and Birgit Sawyer's study, Birgit Sawyer. 2003. "The Civil Wars Revisited." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.), Vol. 82: 43–73; Kåre Lundén. 1976. *Norge under Sverreætten 1177–1319*. Norges Historie Vol. 3. Cappelen's Forlag A.S.: 416–436; Bagge 2010a, 53–68 and 101–110.

4 The king could mainly rely upon his personal retinue consisting of a few hundreds warriors. The main core of his military force consisted of a local levy of amateurs (*Leiðangr*) which was essentially mobilized for military campaign against foreign enemies. See in Per S. Andersen. 1977. *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av landet 800–1130*. Universitetsforlaget; 262–273; Helle 1964, 131–134.

5 See Charles H. Haskins. (1927) 1968. *The Renaissance of the 12th Century*. Meridian Books. About the cultural developments in Norway see Sverre Bagge. 2001. *Da boken kom til Norge*. Vol I. Aschehoug.

new audience able to access written texts.⁶ The Church was the prime mover in the translation of culture to Norway. In particular, the creation of the ecclesiastical province of Nidaros in 1152/53 established an institution of communication in Norway which possessed unparalleled expertise and introduced new means of written and ritualistic communication.⁷ These cultural developments were to provide two fundamental and complementary structures, that of ideological legitimization and that of public opinion, which would form the base for a dialogue creating consent and legitimacy between the king and his subjects.

The present study examines how the Norwegian kingship emerged as a key player in the communication of political legitimization in 12th- and 13th-century Norway. The work will argue that this development was the result of a process of control over and appropriation of the means of written and ritualistic communication and their exploitation as an instrument of government by the Norwegian kings.

Our objectives are to examine the role of communication as an instrument of government and to analyze communication as part of the process of state building. How were the words, the signs and the themes that justified the growth of state exchanged and circulated? How was the production of texts, their utilization and their reception structured? In order to address these issues, the present study analyzes the communication system of the Norwegian kingship as the ensemble of forms and processes of production and reception of communication. It includes several issues which we will attempt to clarify: Who were the actors of communication? What was the content of communication? How did communication develop and by which means? What was the impact of communication?

In the following we will trace the different phases in the production and integration of political communication in the context of cultural and socio-political interaction. Thus the context of the civil war (1130–1240) and the

6 See the studies of Jack Goody. 1996. *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*. Cambridge; Jack Goody and Ian Watt. 1962–1963. "The consequences of literacy." *Comparative studies in society and History*, V: 304–345; Brian Stock. 1983. *The Implications of Literacy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Michael T. Clanchy. (1979) 1993. *From Memory to Written Record. England 1066–1307*. Blackwell Publishing. For Norway, see Leidulf Melve. 2001. *Med ordet som våpen. Tale og skrift i vestleg historie*. Det Norske Samlaget; Arnved Nedkvitne. 2004. *The Social Consequences of Literacy in Medieval Scandinavia*. Brepols.

7 Imsen, Steinar (red.) 2003. *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis. Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*, Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forlag; Mortensen, L.B. 2000b. "The Nordic Archbishoprics as Literary Centres around 1200." In K. Friis-Jensen & I. Skovgaard-Petersen (ed.) *Archbishop Absalon of Lund and his World*. Roskilde Museums Forlag: 133–158.

following period of peace and stability deeply influenced the formation of communication in high medieval Norway in general and the conditions for the development of royal communication in particular. Competition for the throne demanded the expression of ideological legitimacy, whereas peace provided favorable conditions under which means of communication could be controlled and cultivated. In this respect, the development of a written culture in Norway from the mid-12th century onwards was pivotal in providing alternative means to orality as well as gaining the attention and support of a new audience. Appropriating the means of written communication was a monumental challenge for kings, but also constituted an impetus for dynamism and innovation. The development of royal communication was also influenced by the power elite of the Norwegian realm: the Church and the aristocracy. The concentration of symbolic power in the hands of the Norwegian Church in the 12th century had great implications for the crown's own strategies for developing and employing independent modes of communication. In order to understand how communication was shared and balanced between ecclesiastic and secular political spheres, we will examine the complex, collaborative and increasingly competitive relationship between the Church and the crown, and in particular the latter's ambitions to define and advance its own norms and means of expressing political legitimacy. The genesis of an independent communication under the increasingly independent auspices of the crown also unfolded in interplay with the lay aristocracy. In the course of the 12th and 13th centuries, major social and political upheavals curtailed the aristocracy's independence, forcing magnates across the realm to seek protection and privileges as royal servants within the ranks of the *hirð*.⁸ The imposition of royal authority over Norway's aristocracy was a crucial but trying step in the state-formation process, forcing kings to confront and develop strategies to overcome opposition from the realm's most staunchly independent magnates. This tension manifested itself in communication, where kings simultaneously targeted the aristocratic classes as subjects of persuasion, and utilized them as vehicles for royal communication and propaganda.

The chronological delimitation of this work applies a conventional timeframe used in scholarship for studying state-formation in medieval Norway, namely the High Middle Ages, a period stretching approximately from 1150 to

8 The *hirð* was the ruler's retinue which developed greatly in the high middle Ages from being a group of warrior to increasingly fulfil administrative functions. See "Hirð," by Lars Hamre. KLNLM Vol. VI: 568–577.

1310.⁹ This compass covers the period roughly between the foundation of the church province of Nidaros in 1152/53 and the end of the Sverrir dynasty in the first decades of the 14th century. Geographically, the research focuses on the realm of Norway, that is, the mainland Kingdom of Norway and an expanding sphere of control encompassing territories around the North Sea and North Atlantic.¹⁰ The study also aims to contextualize the Norwegian development of royal communication within a European perspective. State-formation was an ongoing process shared by most kingdoms of Western Europe, and one could argue that cultural exchange with France, England and even the Spanish kingdoms influenced the formation of royal communication in Norway. While it is beyond the scope of the present work to systematically compare Norwegian modes of royal communication with those of other European countries, we will at key points underscore similarities and differences in how the kings developed their instruments of communication.

Although Marc Bloch entreated scholars to “cease to consider the state from the sole colour of the monarchy” we can hardly exclude monocratic power when examining the processes of state-building in Western Europe.¹¹ The same applies to the study of communication. The title of this study, *Vox regis*, is a tribute to the pioneering and inspiring study by Sophia Menache on communication in the Middle Ages, *Vox Dei. Communication in the Middle Ages*.¹² The title of Menache’s work was intended to stress her central thesis that there was a decidedly religious foundation to medieval communication, a foundation that was cultivated and dominated by the Church before passing to other institutions. The present work is in no way intended as a challenge to Sophia Menache’s work. Rather, it simply aims at scrutinizing communication from another, secular perspective by examining its royal premises. This approach is not novel. As we will see, scholars of medieval communication like Menache have identified an exclusive political communication associated with the monarch.¹³ The focus on the crown will enable us to fully appreciate the Norwegian kings’ enterprise of appropriating that communication, as well as the greater degree of ideological independence which they achieved with respect to other actors in political communication. Indeed, this study’s focus

9 Helle 1964; Bagge 2012b, 9–38; Hans Jakob Orning, 2008. *Unpredictability and Presence. Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages*. Leiden: Brill.

10 See footnote 3.

11 Quotation from Marc Bloch. (1939) 1994. *La Société Féodale*. Paris: Albin Michel: 581.

12 Sophia Menache. 1990. *Vox Dei. Communication in the Middle Ages*. Oxford University Press.

13 See in this chapter, Theoretical Approaches.

on royal communication raises the difficult question of royal and ecclesiastical relations.¹⁴ In spite of their efforts, kings never attained a total monopoly over royal ideas, myths and messages. The profoundly religious character the Norwegian kingship in the 12th and 13th century, combined with the Church's control over the means of communication, made the ecclesiastical institution the depository for the dissemination of royal ideology. While the practical political initiatives of the church leaders were frequently contested by king, the symbolic power of the Church was seldom challenged. The relationship that the two powers maintained with one another was complex and often vacillated between clear antagonism and intimate cooperation. It is thus difficult to draw a "frontier" between the church and the state. Our focus on the crown however provides the advantage of perceiving the relationship from the viewpoint of a single actor.

The second premise of this study concerns our focus on rupture rather than on continuity. During the period examined, new concepts of legitimation and new channels and technologies to convey them were introduced in Norway. In particular, the development of literacy, the introduction of new liturgy, rituals and ceremonies transformed how Norwegian rulers addressed their subjects. Moreover, new *loci* of communication developed from which kings could address new audiences and inspire new responses. These innovations were decisive in the formation of a royal communication system that aimed at legitimizing the transformations of society.

Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that some characteristics of communication largely remained unchanged during the High Middle Ages. Indeed, Norwegian kings did not wait for the advent of these innovations to communicate with society. Direct interpersonal dialogue based on orality and physical presence continued to be the norm for most communication. This was also the case for the kingship, whose government remained largely itinerant despite real efforts to establish royal centers towards the end of the 13th century. Of course, the theme of orality and direct encounter is not entirely excluded from this study, and we will in particular explore the coexistence and interrelation between traditional modalities and mechanisms for communication and the novel forms introduced by high medieval kings. Indeed, much of the communication of kings was the result of a syncretism between traditional and imported forms for communication and of systematic adaptations of foreign concepts and values to the Norse culture.

14 For a good presentation of the problem, see Jean-Philippe Genet. 1990. "L'Etat moderne: un modèle opératoire?" in Jean-Philippe Genet (ed.) *L'État Moderne: Genèse. Bilans et perspectives*. Paris: Éditions CNRS: 274–278.

1 Historiography: State-making, Communication and Consent

This study carries the major postulate that the making of the Norwegian medieval state was a dialectic process between the state (the kings) and their subjects. The process of dialogue was an essential mechanism in the creation of the state. Indeed, the Norwegian state came into being because it relentlessly spent its energy in legitimizing its existence through shaping meanings and propagating ideas in society. The study of this interaction in the framework of state building is first and foremost a cultural history of the state.

Since the cultural turn, the decisive contribution of culture to the construction of the modern state is no longer an issue of debate. The cultural turn encompasses variegated theoretical, epistemological and methodological approaches from the humanities and social sciences brought together behind a common criticism of traditional meta-theories, structural and functional determinism.¹⁵ Cultural studies are first and foremost a critique of the traditional approach defended by twentieth-century social theorists who privileged the expansion of fiscality and warfare and the institutionalization of the means of domination as fundamental elements in the genesis of the medieval state.¹⁶ This approach is largely based upon the thoughts formulated by Max Weber, whose definition of state emphasized on the development of bureaucratic institutions and the role of coercive power.¹⁷ The works of Charles Tilly have epitomized the Weberian 'thesis' and in particular the role of coercion in the creation of European states. Tilly defines states basically as 'coercion-wielding organizations'.¹⁸ In his view, the control acquired by the state over coercive

15 Lynn Hunt (ed.) 1989. *The New Cultural History*. Berkeley; Richard Biernacki, Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (ed.) 1999. *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*. Berkeley. George Steinmetz. 1999b. *State/Culture. State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

16 Joseph Strayer. (1970) 1998. *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*. Princeton University press; Norbert Elias. (1939) 2000. *The Civilizing Process*. Blackwell Publishing; Perry Anderson. 1974. *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. London: Verso; Immanuel Wallerstein. 1974–1990. *The Modern World System*. 3. Vol. New York: University of California Press; Michael Mann. 1986. *The sources of social Power. Vol. 1 A history of power from the beginning to 1760 AD*. Cambridge University Press; Theda Skocpol. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge University Press.

17 Max Weber. (1919) 2000. *Politics as a vocation*. Fortress Press.

18 Charles Tilly. (1990) 1992. *Coercion, capital, and European states AD 990–1992*; Charles Tilly. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." In Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer & Theda Skocpol (ed.) *Bringing the State Back In*. Cambridge University Press: 169–191.

means (army, police) was a prime factor in the process of centralization, as it stimulated the development of institutions responsible for collecting taxes and the capital necessary to finance military and police operations.

Although culture has never been completely absent from earlier theories of state, culturalists argue that its role has been underestimated, subordinating cultural factors to other features of state such as economy and coercive power, and considering culture as a residual category, an effect of the state.¹⁹ Culturalists regard culture and cultural factors as both constitutive and determinant in the process of state-building.

The issue of manufacturing consent is at the core of the cultural approach to the state and of its critique of pre-existing models. In particular, it criticizes the deterministic approach of past theories that considered the acceptance of the state as the result of a *rational choice*, a process where the individual balances the negative and positive effects of its decision to arrive at action that maximizes personal advantages. An edifying example of this view is found in Joseph Strayer's theory about the origin of the modern state. According to Strayer, the state gained support because it fulfilled the basic needs of the population, in particular their aspirations for peace and security: "the desires of rulers coincided with the needs of their subjects. In an age of violence most men sought, above everything else, peace and security."²⁰ State development is the result of "the agreement on the need for an authority which can give final judgments, and acceptance of the idea that this authority should receive the basic loyalty of its subjects."²¹

This positive conception was challenged by Charles Tilly and his followers, who regarded the state first of all as a war machine, made to wage war and imposing its system through coercive means.²² Despite his insistence on war, Charles Tilly acknowledges the necessity of consent and support in the conduct of war: "No monarch could make war without securing the acquiescence of nearly all of his subject population, and the active cooperation of at least a crucial few." However, in his view this consent was achieved by the use of physical force.²³ The state was thus not a natural response to a need, but a

19 George Steinmetz. 1999a. "Introduction: Culture and the State." in Steinmetz G. (ed.) *State/culture. State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*. Cornell University Press 1999: 1–50.

20 Strayer 1998, 18.

21 *Ibid.*, 10.

22 Tilly 1992; Samuel E. Finer. 1975. "State- and Nation-Building in Europe: The Role of the Military." in Charles Tilly (ed.) *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. Princeton: 84–163.

23 Tilly 1992, 75.

project enforced by a logic of war. A shift occurred with the program of the European Science Foundation (ESF) initiated in the 1990s, which largely furthered Tilly's view, but also introduced the themes of acceptance and legitimation through symbolic means in one of its works: *Iconography, Propaganda, and Legitimation*.²⁴ This work studied how the visual representation of rulers was used to exalt state's authority to the subjects.

For culturalists, besides being a physical construction (institutions and bureaucracy), the state is first and foremost a mental construction. It is a category of thoughts, beliefs and myths that preside over the way the state is perceived by its subjects and consequently over the way they act towards the state.²⁵ The genesis of the state is thus correlated with the shaping of meanings and their implementation in the minds of its subjects. The state's success cannot be understood without addressing the issue of consent and adhesion. For cultural historians of the state, the making of the state is less the result of a "victorious struggle of the monarchy" than a project involving the whole of society.²⁶ The very magnitude of the state's development and the very character of its success over time necessarily implied the participation or at least the acceptance of society.

Jean-Philippe Genet argues that the making of the state was built on a "dialogue" or a "discussion" between the state and its subjects.²⁷ This dialogue was possible because new structures developed in the 12th and 13th centuries which favored exchange of ideas, tools like language and concepts, but also new actors who could undertake the basic function of the exchange, a "political society" (Genet) or "public sphere" (Habermas).²⁸ Through this exchange, new ideas and principles were instilled in the minds of the people in which the state operated. Although the etymology of dialogue and exchange carries some notion of equality, it has become clear that the process was not symmetric. The state played a major role in the shaping of its own representation and perception. In the cultural approach, the process of legitimation of the state is inherently associated with the very development of the state. As Jean-Philippe Genet wrote, "there is, between the development and the reinforcement of modern state power, and the word that allows conceiving, to defend or to attack this

24 Allan Ellenius (ed.) 1998. *Iconography, Propaganda, and Legitimation*. Clarendon Press.

25 Jean-Philippe Genet. 2003. *La genèse de l'État moderne. Culture et société politique en Angleterre*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France: 4.

26 Jean-Philippe Genet. 2010. "Image, représentation et communication politique." in Peter Hoppenbrouwers et al. (ed.) *Power and Persuasion*. Brepols: 277.

27 Genet 1990, 264; Genet 2010, 276.

28 Genet, 2003; Jürgen Habermas. (1962) 1991. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The MIT Press; Patrick Boucheron and Nicholas Offenstadt. 2011. *L'espace public au Moyen Âge. Débats autour de Jürgen Habermas*. Presses Universitaires de France.

development, a close and co-substantial relationship which is at the same time in the order of thinking and of doing.”²⁹ The state is considered a powerful cultural actor “engaged in efforts to order meanings.”³⁰ The involvement of the state and its growing monopolization of the process of legitimation are visible in the fields of propaganda, communication and control over information.³¹ To use the words of Charles Tilly, we could affirm that states make communication and communication makes states.³² The study of communication becomes thus an ideal way to apprehend the formation of the modern state.

Manufacturing Consent: The Norwegian Historiographic Tradition

The genesis of the Norwegian state is a chief theme in Norwegian medieval scholarship. However, the issue of adhesion to royal power and consent has never been fully focused on.

Early research considered the development of royal power and its acceptance by society in confrontational and mechanistic terms, by way of a community of interest. According to this view, society was made up of opposing social groups: those who accepted and supported royal power because they gained from it and those to whom royal development was prejudicial. Scholars have articulated this community of interest in various ways. In their theory of “instrumental kingship,” E. Bull, J. Schreiner, A. Holmsen and K. Lunden explain

29 Genet 2003, 4.

30 William H. Sewell. 1999. “The Concept(s) of Culture.” In Richard Biernacki, Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (ed.) *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*. Berkeley: 56; see also Pierre Bourdieu. 1999. “Rethinking the State: Genesis and structure of the Bureaucratic Field.” in Georges Steinmetz (ed.) *State/Culture. State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*. Cornell University Press: 53–75.

31 About state propaganda and communication see Bertrand Taithe & Thornton Tim (ed.) 1999a. *Propaganda. Political Rhetoric and Identity 1300–1200*. Sutton Publishing: 25–76; Martin Aurell (ed.) 2007c. *Convaincre et Persuader: communication et propagande aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*. Poitiers: CESCUM Universités de Poitiers; Rossana Castano et al. (ed.) 2007. *Comunicazione e propaganda nei secoli XII e XIII*. Viella; Paolo Cammarosano (ed.) 1994. *Le Forme della Propaganda Politica nedl Due e nel Trecento*. École Française de Rome; Culture et Idéologie dans la Genèse de l'État Moderne (1984). École Française de Rome; Philip M. Taylor. 2003 (1990). *Munitions of the Mind. A history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present era*. Manchester University Press: 51–86. About state control over information, see the studies of Bernard Guenée. 1971. *L'Occident aux XI^e et xve siècles. Les Etats*. Presses Universitaires de France: 85–92; Genet 1990, 274–278; Jean-Philippe Genet. 2007. “Légitimation Religieuse et Pouvoir dans l'Europe Médiévale Latine. L'État Moderne et les Masques de la Monarchie Sacrée.” In Jean-Philippe Genet (ed.) *Rome et l'État Moderne Européen*. École Française de Rome: 381–418.

32 See Tilly 1992, 67 ff.

the development and the strengthening of the Norwegian monarchic state as a means for the lay and clerical aristocracy to perpetuate their domination over the populace.³³

In line with Weber and Strayer's rational choice approach to the state, Jens Arup Seip developed a more positive view of the state, which considered the existence of a 'functional relationship' between the king and its people; the king fulfilled and secured the peasantry's basic aspirations for peace and security.³⁴ In a very similar way, Knut Helle's views of the foundation of the modern state's authority rested on the underlying assumption that the process of state building was widely accepted or at least endured by a society of subjects because of it fulfilled their most basic needs for peace and justice.³⁵ Like Weber, Helle conceives the recognition of legitimacy as a free act of clear conscience compelled by rationality. As an eminent illustration of his conception of popular adhesion to the state-project, Helle considers that the incorporation of Iceland into the Norwegian Realm in 1264 associated the island with the process of state-making and "brought peace and greater unity after the bitter power struggle which dominated the last decades of the Free State period."³⁶

New research on the Norwegian medieval state by and large has ignored the cultural approach, remaining on the firm ground of the state, war and institutions. Indeed, the most recent studies on state-making in high medieval Norway remain persistently reluctant to address the implication of culture and communication in the manufacturing of consent and adhesion.³⁷ When it

33 Andreas Holmsen. 1939. *Norges historie. Fra de eldste tider til 1660*. Oslo.

34 Helle, Knut. 1970. "Tendenser i norsk høymiddelalderforskning." In *Norsk lektorlags faglig-pedagogiske skrifter. Nytt frå norsk middelalder* 11. Oslo: 5–45.

35 Helle 2003, 384–385.

36 Knut Helle. 2003. "Towards nationally organised systems of government. (a) Introductory survey." in K. Helle (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia, Vol. I*. Cambridge University Press 2003: 346–347.

37 Bagge 2010a and Leidulf Melve. 2006. "Har staten vendt attende, og i tilfellet: kvar er den?" *Historisk Tidsskrift* (norw.) Vol. 2: 193–230; Bagge 2012b. As a perfect illustration of the persistence of the traditional focus on state-making we can mention the project headed by Steinar Imsen on the Norwegian realm and its dependencies in the High Middle Ages. The project addresses the issue of consolidation of royal power over overseas territories through the themes of taxations, laws and the political role of the Church. Steinar Imsen 2010; Steinar Imsen (ed.) 2012. *'Ecclesia Nidrosiensis' and 'Noregs veldi'. The role of the Church in the making of Norwegian domination in the Norse World*. Akademika publishing. *'Ecclesia Nidrosiensis'* (2012); Steinar Imsen (ed.) 2011. *From tributes to taxes. I: Taxes, tributes and tributary lands in the making of the Scandinavian kingdoms in the Middle Ages*. Tapir Akademisk Forlag.

comes to adhesion to the state, Norwegian scholars have definitively moved away from the positive approach to the state, which automatically found appeal in society, to emphasize domination through the use of physical force and threat.

The Norwegian historian Sverre Bagge has repeatedly addressed the issue of state-making, acknowledging the primacy of war but also the impact of ideas and culture in the genesis of the Norwegian state. He distinguishes between two different means by which the state was enforced in the Norwegian medieval society, coinciding with two different stages in the process of state-making. Strongly influenced by Tilly, Bagge lays emphasis on the use of “military means,” that is, coercive force as the main instrument of royal power during the civil war (1130–1240).³⁸ In his view, the war pacified the Norwegian society by eliminating aristocratic opposition and favoring the recruitment of an aristocracy in the king’s service. He argues that during the war, the support of the aristocracy was obtained through “party discipline,” personal loyalty to the military leaders.³⁹ After the civil war came a period of internal peace (1240–1350) in which “civilian” means were decisive in the formation and acceptance of the state: justice and legislation, the Church and the Christian religion.⁴⁰ Bagge’s examination of political literature and royal histories has demonstrated the growing presence of ideological theory in the overall argumentation, justifying kingship in particular in the aristocratic elite.⁴¹ However, much of the aristocracy’s support for the kings stemmed from a transfer of loyalty from their party to the winning dynasty.⁴² According to Bagge, the peasants’ support was based on a combined effect of repression – use of physical force against revolts – and of persuasion – a ‘peasant-friendly’ ideology.⁴³ To some extent, Bagge shares Helle’s view when he considers that peasants supported the growth of royal power because of a ‘functional relationship’ between kings and the people. In particular, Bagge points out the development of a royal justice which he believes was highly beneficial for the peasantry.⁴⁴

38 Bagge 2010a, 379; Sverre Bagge. 2003b. *Fra knyttneve til scepter. Makt i middelalderens Norge*. Bergen: Makt- og demokratiutredningen 1998–2003: 90.

39 Bagge 2010a, 63.

40 Bagge 2010a, 380–387.

41 Sverre Bagge. 1987a. *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson’s Heimskringla*. University of California Press; 1993. “Ideology and Propaganda in Sverris saga”; 1996. *From Gang Leader to the Lord’s Anointed. Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*; 1987b. *The Political Thought of The King’s Mirror*. Odense University Press.

42 Bagge 2010a, 380.

43 Bagge 1986: 192.

44 *Ibid.*

The primacy of war and coercion, tempered by the work of culture and ideas, finds its perfect expression in Bagge's consideration of the Norwegian experience as a "soft" state-formation.⁴⁵ Paradoxically, Bagge considers neither coercion nor adhesion and consent a big issue for state-formation in Norway: "Norway was easy to conquer and easy to hold, once a strong power had managed to establish itself. It could be kept without too much violence but gave relatively little surplus, which in turn meant that the most profitable way to govern it was with some degree of consent from the population and by making use of its service."⁴⁶

The theme of obedience and submission has been recently been taken up once more by H.J. Orning in his thesis "Unpredictability and Presence."⁴⁷ In his study, Orning examines the Norwegian kings' exercise of power in contexts of conflict. In Orning's view the Norwegian kings achieved control, enforced their decisions, and obtained the obedience of their subjects through coercive mechanisms of intimidation rather than through the idealized principles of obedience and service depicted and promoted in royal literature. The two elements on which Norwegian kings based the exercise of their power, the physical presence of the king and the unpredictability of his decisions, according to Orning formed "fundamental rules of political behaviour in the period."⁴⁸ The impossibility of predicting royal decisions and behavior led to uncertainty, which readily generated insecurity – the intended effect – in the population. This state of mind was encouraged by the king's ability to exert direct physical pressure on his subjects, if necessary using military force.

Although Orning acknowledges that there was a growing production of ideology during the period, he believes that the gap between reality and this production was too great and that "the king would have had had an arduous task if he had tried to live according to the royal ideology in his everyday actions."⁴⁹ For Orning, pre-state basis for royal power endured long into the 13th century, reducing the role of ideology in the affirmation of subordination to almost nothing before 1240.⁵⁰ However, he assumes that for royal ideology to function, particularly favorable combinations of circumstances are necessary. Only the "more peaceful conditions after 1240" made it possible for "the demands

45 Bagge 2010a, 380.

46 *Ibid.*, 281.

47 Orning, 2008.

48 *Ibid.*, 2.

49 *Ibid.*, 342.

50 Orning 2008.

of the crown [to] sink into the people, and become part of everyday life and custom.”⁵¹ In Orning’s view, the role of royal ideology is limited to “an expression of a strengthened central power.”⁵² Accordingly, ideology is produced to sanction *a posteriori* an accomplished fact – the obedience and subordination of subjects, but does not actively contribute to creating them.

The approaches sketched above have by and large minimized the role of culture and ideology in the making of the Norwegian state and even deny much of its importance during conflicts. The present study of royal communication will show that these factors were inherent to the process of state-building at every stage. In particular we will demonstrate that conflicts were a decisive element in the formation of a system of communication in the service of the Norwegian kings. Finally and most importantly, the examination of royal communication in the High Middle Ages will reveal the mechanisms behind the manufacturing of consent and adhesion to the Norwegian state project. Behind the “communalities of interest” laid a dialectic process from which emerged conceptions and ideas that “fed” a mutual understanding of the utility of the state. The study of communication also provides a better comprehension of power in practice in revealing the functioning, the rules and the very premises on which the kings established their authority.

2 Perspectives on Communication and Power

The present work aims at analyzing the constitution of a communication specifically controlled and exploited by the Norwegian kings. At the very core of this enterprise lies an understanding of power and communication in the framework of medieval state building. In the search for the Norwegian kingship’s involvement in communication, the analysis faces a series of theoretical and methodological challenges. The very nature of communication and the specific source situation of the Middle Ages pose a challenge to the identification and characterization of royal commitment. This obstacle is clearly epitomized in the ambiguity between communication (a transmission *a priori* power-free) and propaganda (deliberate manipulation of information). Finally, the analysis is confronted with the need to delimit the frame of royal involvement. Scholars of communication address the study of communication in terms of a communication system or systems. The distinction is crucial both

⁵¹ Orning 2008, 342.

⁵² *Ibid.*

for our understanding of the nature of royal communication and its development and for the definition of the research field.

Power, Communication and State Building

A multitude of approaches to power exist. Culturalists and communication theorists however have developed a definition of power stressing its performative and relational character. The performative approach considers power not as an attribute, but as the product of a relationship. According to this view power is not something that can be possessed, and the relationship between those who are empowered and those who are subjected to this empowerment is not limited to the expression and manifestation of power. On the contrary, power cannot be “abstracted from the specific relationship” as it is created precisely at the very moment of expression and performance.⁵³ The very source of power thus lies in the interaction between the actors of the relationship. This definition of power stresses the performance of each actor in the exchange as a constitutive element of power.

In his study on state building, the Swiss historian André Holenstein coined the term “empowering interaction” to emphasize the dialectic and performative character of state power. Holenstein saw the state as “the outcome of players ‘activities.’”⁵⁴ Although it emphasizes the reciprocity of exchanges, the relational character of power does not mean that interactions are symmetric. The various partners of the exchange are not equal as the interaction develops in a context of power and domination. Thus the actors can be hierarchically related to each other by social, political and cultural criteria providing them with different opportunities for participation in the relationship. For instance, those holding physical power can alter the premises for the exchange in backing their performance with violence.⁵⁵ Asymmetry can also emerge from the actors’ purpose and intention to use the interaction to influence each other, for instance in organizing the exchange around an agenda defined by the initiator.

53 Manuel Castells. 2009. *Communication power*. Oxford University Press: 11; Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger. 2009. “The Impact of Communication Theory on the Analysis of the Early Modern Statebuilding Processes.” In Wim Blockmans *et al.* (ed.) *Empowering Interactions. Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe 1300–1900*. Ashgate: 315.

54 André Holenstein. 2009. “Introduction: Empowering Interactions: Looking at Statebuilding from Below.” In Wim Blockmans *et al.* (ed.) *Empowering Interactions. Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe 1300–1900*. Ashgate: 28.

55 Castells 2009, 11–14.

The dialectic character of power has led historians to consider “all historical phenomena [...] as communication processes” and the scholarship of state building in particular to look at communication as a decisive process in the creation of state power.⁵⁶

In this respect the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has been highly influential in ascribing claims of monopoly over communication to the state. According to Bourdieu, the genesis of the state is a process of concentration of different types of capital (physical violence, economic, informational and symbolic capital).⁵⁷ Two of these capitals, informational and symbolic capitals, seek to impose specific cognitive structures in the minds of the state’s subjects. The concentration of symbolic capital enables the state to dominate the construction of meanings and categories of perceptions of reality. These specific cognitive structures legitimize the very existence of the state to the extent that Bourdieu stresses the difficulty to think the state outside the mental frames which the state itself has defined.⁵⁸ These forms of thinking and in particular the categories of perceiving the state are imposed upon the minds of the state’s subjects through processes of implementation and inculcation sustained by state instruments of information and communication (informational capital). In Bourdieu’s view, the educational systems and language play a decisive role in the imposition of the state’s conceptions, structuring thoughts and social relationships.⁵⁹

It is among sociologists and historians of propaganda that we find the most advanced reflections about the role of communication in the state. In his analysis of modern propaganda, the sociologist Jacques Ellul points to the use of propaganda by the modern state as an instrument of government. Transcending the distinction between totalitarian regimes and western democracies, Ellul considers propaganda a state necessity, as the exercise of state power and its efficiency rests on the participation and support of the masses. This necessity, he argues, is no less urgent for modern democracies based on consensus, where persuasion is an integral part of the political process. The role of propaganda is to enable the state to obtain the allegiance of the masses to the state’s causes.⁶⁰ In his *Munitions of the mind*, Taylor considers propaganda, if not a specific

56 Stollberg-Rilinger 2009, 313–317.

57 Bourdieu 1999, 53–75.

58 *Ibid.*

59 Pierre Bourdieu. 1991. *Language & Symbolic Power*. Polity Press: 45.

60 Jacques Ellul. (1965) 1973. *Propaganda. The formation of Men’s Attitudes*. New York: Vintage Books: 118–138.

attribute of the state, at least an “instrument in the arsenal of power” which necessitates advanced organization.⁶¹

The decisive role of communication and its sister propaganda in the concentration of state power is the result of a process of control and appropriation of the media and channels of communication.⁶²

Ellul considers the existence of mass media a basic precondition for propaganda.⁶³ Mass media not only convey propaganda but also create the precondition for its reception in conditioning people to develop a need for propaganda. However, in order to be effective, propaganda necessitates a high level of organization and control over the media that only a state can provide through monopolization.⁶⁴ “Only through concentration in a few hands of large number of media can one attain a true orchestration, a continuity, and an application of scientific methods of influencing individuals.”⁶⁵

In their *Manufacturing Consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky established a model of propaganda and political/economic power based on the control over the means and the content of communication. In their examination of modern media, they stress the collusion between the political and economic elites – based on a communality of interest – in the use of propaganda as a means to bolster their power.⁶⁶

The concentration of power which characterizes state-building also concerned the monopolization of the production of ideas and principles legitimizing the state and their diffusion in society. Most of the discussions concern the 20th century state, that is a state with highly sophisticated organizational structure, and in particular the existence of modern means of communication capable of reaching large parts of society, if not society as a whole, namely mass media. The medieval state differed from today’s state both quantitatively and qualitatively. The conditions for communication and the technology available to spread ideas and norms were much more limited. However, the processes surrounding communication and its control were deeply inscribed in the very matrix of state-making, and the present work will monitor their very beginning in the context of the genesis of the medieval state.

61 Taylor 2003, 4–10.

62 Stollberg-Rilinger 2009, 317.

63 Ellul 1973, 102.

64 *Ibid.*, 20–24.

65 *Ibid.*, 103.

66 Noam Chomsky & Herman, E.S. 1988. *Manufacturing consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Random House.

Communication, Propaganda and Communication System

The previous considerations illustrate the state's decisive implication in communication and in particular the intrinsic necessity for the state to achieve control over means of communication. The issue of state control over communication proves to be arduous however, as communication functions on different levels stretching from the explicit to the implicit, from deliberate and intentional to incidental and unconscious, thus blurring intentionality and the implication of power. This constant ambiguity is epitomized in the opposition between propaganda and communication.

During the past twenty years, the history of communication has increasingly captured the attention of medievalists.⁶⁷ To a large extent, the definitions and conceptual frame chosen by medievalists rely upon social disciplines like social anthropology, sociology and media studies. However, if the study of communication is new, medieval research has for long been acquainted with its flipside: propaganda.⁶⁸

Propaganda and communication are both modern terms which did not exist or were not used in medieval societies. The term of propaganda emerged in the 17th century and designated a committee of cardinals, *Sacra Congregatio de propaganda fide*, which was in charge of spreading the Catholic faith in the new world in order to counter Protestantism.⁶⁹ In its neutral sense, propaganda means to disseminate and promote particular ideas in order to persuade and influence a recipient. However, during the 20th century, the term gained a clear pejorative connotation, becoming synonymous with lies, deceit, psychological manipulation, even mental rape.⁷⁰ The term 'propaganda' is usually correlated with a strong and deliberate intention to influence an audience by any means. According to Taylor, the issue of intent is propaganda's trademark. Propaganda is "designed primarily to serve the self-interests of the person or people doing the communication."⁷¹

Communication does not suffer from the same lack of credit. In its broad usage, "communication" is defined as an exchange of information given and

67 Marco Mostert. 1999a. *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*. Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, Turnhout: Brepols; Menache, 1990; Aurell 2007c; Castano 2007.

68 Nicole Grévy-Pons. 1980. "Propagande et sentiment national pendant le règne de Charles VI: L'exemple de Jean de Montreuil." *Francia*, 8: 127–145; George Makdisi *et al.* (red.) 1980. *Prédication et propagande au Moyen Age*. Presses Universitaires de France; Menache 1990, 98–123.

69 Robert Jackall. 1995. "Introduction." In Robert Jackall (ed.) *Propaganda*. New York: New York University Press: 1.

70 Serge Chakhotin. 1940. *Rape of the Masses: The Psychology of Totalitarian Political Propaganda*. Alliance Book Corporation.

71 Taylor 2003, 7.

received more or less consciously.⁷² Theoretically, the concept of communication seems to ignore the fact that deceit, persuasion and manipulation are parts of communication. The overall assumption of the benevolent character of communication places the actors of the exchange on equal foot, with the same opportunities to act. The etymology of the term sustains the view of communication as union and sharing. "Communication" comes from the Latin, *communis*, which means "for the common use," and *communicare*, "put in common."⁷³ In practice however, any clear-cut distinction between communication and propaganda is difficult to establish. Indeed, in the literature of medieval communication and propaganda, the two terms symptomatically are used together recurrently.⁷⁴ On the other hand, the historian Jacques Le Goff developed the concept of "diffuse propaganda," that is to say, a propaganda without any distinctive source or immediate political purpose and spreading general ideas and values, such as the exaltation of royalty or chivalric honor.⁷⁵

It is clear that communication is not exempt from political power and can also serve the interests of power. In our contemporary societies, modern political leaders have communication strategists and advisors who look at their image and perception in the public opinion in order to gain votes or support for their policies. At the very core of communication, a relation of power exists. The modalities of communication are influenced by the socio-political and cultural context in which communication unfolds. As we have seen, control over the means of communication (media, location) determines the premises for the exchange and establishes a relation of power between the various actors. Communication also develops within a specific time frame. The repetition and recurrence of messages over time function as doxic processes, implementing a particular point of view which is presented as a universal and a self-evident truth.⁷⁶ These processes are effective, but are often difficult to trace back to any particular source.⁷⁷ Communication becomes then as much a medium for persuasion and indoctrination as propaganda.

The concepts of propaganda and communication thus carry a prejudicial blurredness in regard to their intentionality. This constitutes a challenge for

72 Mostert 2012, 4–6.

73 "Communis," in Niermeyer 2002, 292.

74 Aurell 2007c; Castano 2007.

75 Jacques Le Goff. 1994. "Conclusions." In Cammarosano 1994: 519–520.

76 Pierre Bourdieu. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press: 164; Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. *Distinction. A social critic of the judgement of taste*. London: Harvard University Press: 470 ff.

77 See for instance the conception of the society of the three orders and its 'way' in the minds of people from the middle Ages to the 18th century, Georges Duby. 1982. *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*. University of Chicago Press.

interpretation which may lead us to identify an intention and the expression of a political agenda where there is none, and assign power a greater capacity and ability to take action than it had in reality. Similarly, clear intentions can go unnoticed because the source situation does not allow us to realize their importance.

Among the problems of identifying of power and its influence in communication we can also number the difficulties of delimiting the extent of royal control over communication, its field of action and its sphere of influence. This issue is fundamental in delineating the frame of our study object.

In the historiography of medieval communication, scholars have addressed communication in terms of a communication system.⁷⁸ This term refers to the entire processes of communication, the ideas and concepts that are exchanged, and the conditions for their production and reception.⁷⁹ To materialize this vague definition, we could say that the communication system of the kingship is all the practices, processes and objects used and controlled by kings and enabling them to formulate the crown's proper visions and to express its proper pretensions. Two opposing conceptions of communication systems exist, each offering a particular understanding of their formation.

In her seminal work on medieval communication, Sophia Menache speaks of several communication systems, designating the entire process of communication particular to a hegemonic (Church, monarchy) or counter-hegemonic power (heretic movements).⁸⁰ In her view, the Church, the Western monarchies and heretic movements – concurrently though not independently – successively developed specific forms and methods of communication to establish their hegemony over society. Menache sees in the emergence of communication systems a “crucial stage in the development of medieval society.”⁸¹ She operates with a distinction which is meant to reflect the simultaneous “stages in the disintegration process of the traditional society.”⁸² The genesis of successive systems marked a political and cultural evolution towards a greater “vulgarization” of communication and the progressive loss of control over communication within elites (from Church to monarchy) and from the elites to the people. At the core of this approach lies the conviction that communication systems are the product of particular contexts. They are “process *sui generis*” which primarily

78 Genet 2010, 275–289; Genet 2003; Menache 1990.

79 Genet 2010, 275–289; Genet 2003, 1–8.

80 Menache 1990.

81 *Ibid.*, 275.

82 *Ibid.*

“reflects the socio-political structures within which [they] operate.”⁸³ The model does not totally exclude transfers and interactions between the different systems, yet it clearly emphasizes the compartmentalization of communication into distinctive frames.

The French historian Jean-Philippe Genet has rejected this polarization. He argues that there were no different and competing communication systems, but rather a single inclusive system. He acknowledges however that some institutions “could build up their own sub-systems, relatively autonomous, through specific means which ‘distinguish’ them from the all-embracing system.”⁸⁴ In his view these sub-systems cannot be understood outside the frame of this single system, as it is this latter which gives them “their meaning, their function and their importance in their relation to each other.”⁸⁵ This approach significantly reduces the autonomous character of hegemonic systems (Menache) or sub-systems (Genet), by contrast stressing their interdependency and common roots.

In this analysis, I found it easier to distinguish – as did Sophia Menache – a communication system proper to the Norwegian kings which, although it reduces the interlocking character of communication systems, allows us to appreciate the processes of empowerment and of appropriation particular to the formation of a system of royal communication. Genet’s approach however reminds us that regardless of how specific and independent a system is, it is not a *creatio ex nihilo*, nor does it develop in isolation. On the contrary, it is the result of constant exchanges and interconnections, thus relativizing the extent of state control over communication.

3 Method and Sources

The aim of this study is to scrutinize the communication system of the Norwegian monarchy in the context of state making. In order to answer to this question, I address the source material by way of a method which borrows much from the methodological tools used to analyze modern communication and propaganda. Although no single method dominates in the examination of communication process, most studies build upon a

83 *Ibid.*, respectively 151 and 4.

84 Jean-Philippe Genet. 1997. *L’histoire et les nouveaux publics dans l’Europe médiévale (XIIIe–XVe siècles)*, Publications de la Sorbonne: 15; Genet 2010, 279–280.

85 Genet 1997, 15.

threefold model *sender-message-receiver*.⁸⁶ Starting from this basic model, I have elaborated two major themes of research, each leading to further sub-questions:

1. The actors of communication
2. The vectors of communication

1 *The Actors of Communication*

Who is communicating? This field of analysis considers all the human participants in the chain of communication from the sender of the message to its audience, and will consist in identifying their nature, origin, and function in communication. Theorists distinguish between the source and the sender; the source being the person or institution that generates the message and the sender being the person or institution that sends or relays the message on behalf of the source. Analyzing royal communication, it is understood that royal power is the source and that the sender acts on its behalf. In some cases, the process of communication goes directly back to the royal person, for example when the king himself is the author of a text or when he performs personally in front of an audience (public speeches, gestures and in the staging of rituals). Besides the king, royal communication encompasses a broad panel of communicators of different natures and origins, whether commissioned by a prince or acting of their own will in order to win the favor of their masters: official biographers, translators, artists, ideologues. Identifying these communicators can prove a difficult task because most of them are anonymous and a clear-cut distinction between source and sender is not always possible. The issue of the sender is important in the communication process. The sender chooses his audience and his method of communication. He is also listening to the way the message is received and may adapt this in order to improve the effect he expects to achieve.⁸⁷ Recent theories on authorship have emphasized the significant influence of the author on the message, an influence that exceeded the simple function of writer.⁸⁸ An important aspect discussed is the

86 Martin Aurell. 2007d. "Rapport introductif." In Aurell 2007c: 11–49; Robert Halleux. 2007. "Conclusion." In Aurell 2007c: 715–722; Menache 1990, 6; Marco Mostert, 1999b. "New approaches to Medieval Communication?" In Mostert 1999a: 19–21; Taithe and Thornton 1999b; G.S. Jowett & V. O'Donnell. 1992. *Propaganda and Persuasion*. 2nd Edition. Newbury Park; Nicholas J. O'Shaughnessy. 2004. *Politics and Propaganda*. Manchester University Press.

87 Windlesham 1966, 17–30.

88 Michel Zimmermann (ed.) 2001a. *Auctor et Auctoritas. Invention et conformisme dans l'écriture médiévale*. Paris: École des Chartes; Van Egmond W.S. 1999. "The Audience of

motivation of the communicator. This motivation is seldom explicitly formulated and one has to rely upon the nature of the ideology promoted to guess at the effect desired by its promoter. Through the analysis of the social context in which the message is generated, its premises and its purposes are more easily understood. Finally, the issue of agents of royal communication was of key importance when competency and know-how was monopolized by a competing institution. In the Middle Ages, the Church controlled much of the means of written and ritualistic communication.⁸⁹ The acquisition or control of expertise by the Norwegian kings was a decisive element in the formation of royal communication. A major matter of research in this study will be to identify the relation of power and the strategies developed by the kingship to achieve control over the production of communication.

The issue of audience is essential in the examination of medieval communication. Communication is motivated by the desire to convey a message to a target audience. The concept of public opinion is at the heart of the scholarship of medieval state-formation,⁹⁰ initiating a debate around the pertinence of Habermas's theories for the Middle Ages.⁹¹ The source and the specific socio-political context of the Middle Ages present important challenges to the examination of audience. First, medieval society was strictly divided into groups or classes defined by economic, political, cultural and ideological criteria.⁹² Thus in contrast to modern communication, which essentially aims at the masses,⁹³ medieval communication only addressed a

Hagiographical Texts," in Mostert M. (red.) *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, Turnout Brepols: 41–67; Dominique Maingueneau. 1990. *Pragmatique pour le discours littéraire*. Paris: Armand Colin; Hans Robert Jauss. 1982. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

89 Menache 1990, 9–123; Genet 1997, 11–24; Bernard Guenée. 1980. *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval*. Paris: Éditions Aubier-Montaigne: 44–58.

90 The constitution of a learned public and a « political society » is central in the making of the state. See Genet 2003; Genet 1997; Bernard Guenée. 2002. *L'opinion publique à la fin du Moyen Age d'après la "Chronique de Charles VI" du religieux de Saint-Denis*. Paris: Perrin; See also Joseph R. Strayer. 1957. "The Historian's Concept of Public Opinion." In Mirra Komarovsky (ed.) *Common Frontiers of the Social Sciences*. Glencoe: Free Press: 263–268; Björn Weiler. 2007. *Kingship, Rebellion and Political Culture. England and Germany, c. 1215–c. 1250*. Palgrave Macmillan: 105–171.

91 See the seminal work of Habermas on the public sphere (Habermas 1991) and the study of this concept applied to the Middle Ages in Boucheron 2011.

92 For an overview on the topic see, Duby 1982; Giles Constable. 1995. *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*. University of Cambridge: 249–360.

93 Ellul 1973; Taithe & Thornton 1999b. Jowett & O'Donnell 1992; O'Shaughnessy 2004.

fragmented audience.⁹⁴ Moreover, in our sources, the audience is seldom mentioned. The identification of the audience must often be made through the work itself. The nature of the message, the theme proposed, the language used and the vector of communication employed can help us to identify to whom it was assigned. The specific cultural context of the Middle Ages also helps. In a proto-literate society, the use of the written word more or less clearly points to the elite, whereas orality seems to be confined to the populace. Yet here too, the common practice of group and loud reading blurs the lines between literates and illiterates.⁹⁵

Another major question will be the evaluation of the impact of communication. The exchange of ideas, values and norms sought to implement changes in the audience, persuade and convince it. Was the communication of kings successful? Medievalists do not have at their disposal modern instruments for measuring public opinion, like polltakers, to gauge the impact of communication. The success of a campaign of propaganda or popular consent can often only be measured by observing long-term developments and effects.

2 *The Vectors of Communication*

The second field of analysis more particularly addresses the technical factors of communication: the content of communication and the means of communication.

The identification of the content of communication – that is the themes and concepts which the kings wished to promote and implement – and the mental frame of their reception is both exciting and challenging. The development of the medieval state in Norway in the 12th and 13th century unfolded within a context of cultural revival and increasing exchange of ideas throughout Western Europe.⁹⁶ The development of the ecclesiastical institution in Norway in the mid-12th century favored the diffusion of thoughts and of the written word at a level never previously reached. In particular, the Church brought to Norway a new set of representations, principles and rules of power which were to lay the foundation for a modern kingship. However, foreign

94 Le Goff 1994, 519–528.

95 Stock 1983, 30–87; Guglielmo Cavallo and Chartier Roger (ed.) 1999. *A History of Reading in the West*. University of Massachusetts Press: 90–178; Henri-Jean Martin. 1994. *The History and Power of Writing*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 43–181.

96 Haskins 1968. Haskins' view has been discussed and nuanced by Thomas Bisson and Dominique Barthélemy, Thomas N. Bisson. 2009. *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century. Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Dominique Barthélemy. 1992. "La mutation féodale a-t-elle eu lieu? (Note critique)." *Annales: E.S.C.*: 767–777.

impulses developed within a context of overlapping pagan, pre-state traditions and Christian beliefs and norms (Norway was officially Christianized from the mid-11th century).⁹⁷ The Norwegian crown could thus draw on a reservoir of exogenous and endogenous themes, sometimes coexisting and sometimes competing with each other, to conduct their communication.

The formative period of the medieval state also coincided with the development of new means of communication. The scholarship of medieval communication distinguishes between verbal and non-verbal forms of communication.⁹⁸ Verbal forms of communication concern the written and the spoken word. The written word has long been associated with the making of the state.⁹⁹ The development of written culture in Europe and Scandinavia, particularly in the 12th and 13th centuries, was a decisive element in the communication of kings.¹⁰⁰ The transformation of Norwegian society into a proto-literate culture in the 13th century shaped a new context of communication where control and use of the written word were to become key means of achieving power. In the following we will examine the use of written communication by the Norwegian kings as well as the conditions under which they appropriated the written word. Despite the increase in literacy, the spoken word remained the privileged form of communication for Norwegian kings throughout the Middle Ages. Public speeches, songs, poems and reading aloud were powerful means of communication and propaganda as they potentially reached a broad audience, both illiterate and literate, simultaneously. The fact that we can only access oral communication through written texts poses a problem for analysis and prevents us from really assess the value of the performance.¹⁰¹

The direct interpersonal performance of kings, like in public speeches, was often sustained by gestures, attitudes and visual signs. These non-verbal forms of communication were central in medieval society, a “civilisation du geste” *par excellence*.¹⁰² During the period covered by this study, the Norwegian kings cultivated a wide range of rituals and ceremonies, from crowning and anointing ceremonies to public trials and town entries. These rituals were important vectors of propaganda, exalting royal authority and legitimacy, and creating

97 See for instance, Gro Steinsland *et al.* (eds) 2011. *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages. Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faroes*. Leiden: Brill.

98 Mostert 1999a, 19–37; Aurell 2007c, 34–49.

99 Goody 1996 and Clanchy 1993.

100 Melve 2001, 127–146; Nedkvitne 2004, 67–156; Pernille Hermann (ed.) 2005. *Literacy in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian Culture*. University of Southern Denmark: 9–18.

101 James, Knirk. 1981. *Oratory in the King's Sagas*. Universitetsforlaget: 11–14.

102 Jacques Le Goff. (1977) 2008. *La civilisation de l'Occident médiévale*. Flammarion: 329.

opportunities to redefine power relations in society.¹⁰³ However the monopoly of clerics over rituals and ceremonies of power led to tension between the Church and the Norwegian kingship, with each power competing for control. Again we can only approach ritualistic performance through the narrative of written records, as Philippe Buc has pointed out, making our understanding of gestures and of their signification for their audience dependent on authorial intentions and strategies.¹⁰⁴

Finally, the study opens up the analysis of the *loci* of communication. The dialectic process which the communication of kings – whether verbal or non-verbal – with society involved developed in a spatial context, which not only served as a platform for the exchange but actively conditioned its very premises.¹⁰⁵ The development of *loci* of communication production (court, towns, ritual places) was an important element in the making of a communication system and control over these *loci* was often a source of conflict.

The period examined is characterized by its great profusion of written sources in Latin and the vernacular: royal genealogies, sagas, chivalric romances, political literature, chronicles, diplomas and charters. As we will see, not all of these types of literature developed at the same time. Latin histories were a 12th-century phenomenon, whereas vernacular sagas constitute the main bulk of narrative up until the end of the 13th century. Chivalric literature developed in Norway roughly between 1225 and 1315. The progressive drying up of narrative sources in the end of the 13th century is compensated by the rapid development of charter material from 1280 onward.

The study aims at analyzing royal communication and for this reason we have focused in particular on documents written in direct or indirect connection with the Norwegian crown. This concerns political literature first and foremost. *A speech against the bishops* is an anticlerical pamphlet most probably written under the reign of King Sverre.¹⁰⁶ The text was the first political treatise

103 Geoffrey Koziol. 1992. *Begging Pardon and favour. Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France*. Cornell University Press; Sean Wilentz (ed.) 1985. *Rites of power. Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Gerd Althoff. 2003. *Die Macht der Rituale. Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter*. Primus Verlag.

104 Philippe Buc. 2001. *The Dangers of Ritual. Between Early Medieval texts and Social Scientific Theory*. Princeton University Press.

105 Frances Andrews (ed.) 2011. *Ritual and Space in the Middle Ages*. Donington: Shaun Tyas; Barbara H. Rosenwein. 1999. *Negotiating Space. Power, restraint, and privileges of immunity in early medieval Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

106 The Old Norse version used in this study is from Anne Holtmark. 1931. *En Tale mot Biskopene. En sproglig-historisk undersøkelse*. Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi I Oslo. The English translation is from *Anecdota Sverreri. A Defence of the King against the Bishops*

made in Norway and is a remarkable source for our understanding of royal propaganda against the Norwegian clergy.¹⁰⁷ Half a century later, the court of the Norwegian kings issued the *Konungs Skuggsía*¹⁰⁸ (c. 1250) or The King's Mirror, a book of conduct for princes compiling chapters on the geography, the climate and the animal life of the northern regions and considering the conduct of merchants, retainers and the king.¹⁰⁹ This work is essential to our understanding of royal communication as a valuable source of information about court life and rituals of kingship. In addition, we have the *Hirðskrá*¹¹⁰ (1273–1277), or Law of the *hirð*, a document which regulated the relationship between the king and his retinue and between the retainers themselves. The law also provides descriptions of the ritual of king-taking (*konungstekja*) as well as information about the laws of succession.

From the second quarter of the 13th century, chivalric romances and poems were translated into Old Norse. The corpus of translated works is comprehensive and highlights the growing involvement of the Norwegian kingship in the written word, with several translations commissioned by the kings.¹¹¹

The main bulk of material sources used in this study however consists of narrative sources and in particular sagas: *Sverris saga*,¹¹² *Böglunga sögur*,¹¹³

and *Clergy, out of the Canon Law (Decretum Graciani)*, translated by Joseph Sephton. 1994. Felinfach: Llanerch Press: 241–261.

- 107 The seminal work of Erik Gunnes is the reference on the *Speech*. Erik Gunnes. 1971. *Kongens Ære. Kongemakt og kirke I "En tale mot biskopene."* Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag.
- 108 The Old Norse version of the *Konungs Skuggsía* used in this study is *Konungs Skuggsía*, ed. L. Holm-Olsen 1945, Oslo: Kjelteskriftfondet. The English translation is L.M. Larson. 1917. *The King's Mirror*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- 109 The best study on the *Konungs Skuggsía* today remains Bagge 1987b.
- 110 The original version of *Hirðskrá* finds in *Norges Gamle Love indtil 1387*. Vol 11. Kristiania 1846–1895: 387–450. A partial English translation finds in Lawrence G. Berge. 1968. *Hirðskrá 1–37, a translation with notes*. MA thesis University of Wisconsin.
- 111 For an overview over these translations see, E.F. Halvorsen. 1973. "Norwegian Court Literature in the Middle Ages." *Orkney Miscellany* Vol. 5, Kirkwall: Orkney County Library: 17–26; Jürg Glauser. 2005. "Romance (Translated riddarasögur)," in Rory McTurk (ed.) *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, Blackwell Publishing: 372–387; Kalinke, Marianne. 2005. "Norse Romance (Riddarasögur)," in Carol J. Clover & John Lindow (eds.). *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, University of Toronto Press: 316–363.
- 112 The Old Norse version of the *Sverris saga* used in this study is *Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4*, ed. Gustav Indrebø, Den Norske Historiske Kildeskriftkommissjon, Kristiania 1920. The English translation is J. Sephton. 1994. *The Saga of King Sverri of Norway*. Llanerch Press.
- 113 *Böglunga sögur*, ed. Hallvard Magerøy. 1988. Norsk Historisk Kjelteskrift-Institutt. Oslo: Solum Forlag A/S. There is no English translation of the sagas.

*Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*¹¹⁴ and *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss*.¹¹⁵ These sagas provide a near-continuous narrative of the lives and doings of Norwegian kings between 1177 and 1277. *Sverris saga* tells the life of King Sverre (1145–1202) and was written around 1210. The work was built on a text, *Grýla*, written under the supervision of Sverre himself (1185–88).¹¹⁶ *Böglunga sögur* were written early in the 1220s and relate events from 1202 to 1217. The *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* and the *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* respectively tell the stories of King Hákon Hákonsson (1204–1263) and of King Magnus the Lawmender (1263–1280). *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* is only extant in two fragments relating the events of 1264–66 and 1272–1273.¹¹⁷

The nature of the topic discussed in this study has led us to consider the narrative material in our analysis of high medieval communication both as media information and as an instrument of persuasion and communication. On the one hand, the corpus of written material was the product of 12th- and 13th-century communication and informs us about the conditions of communication at the time they were written and what role these texts played in the communication of their producers. On the other hand, these same histories provide us valuable information about how communication proceeded in the past.

The value of saga literature as a source of history is a constant matter of debate in modern scholarship. Most of 19th- and 20th-century historiography was dominated by a tradition that denied any value to sagas, instead preferring normative sources such as charters and laws.¹¹⁸ The emergence of cultural studies in the eighties revived the interest in saga literature. Sagas were considered

114 The original version of the *Hákonar saga* used in this study is *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar etter Sth. 8 fol., AM 325 VIII, 4 og AM 304,4*, ed. Marina Mundt, Kjeldeskriftfondet, Oslo 1977. The English translation is George W. Dasent. 1997. *The Saga of Hacon*. Llanerch Publishers (1894).

115 *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss*, in *Fornmanna sögur* Vol X, Kaupmannahöfn. Det kongelige nordiske Oldskriftselskab 1935: 155–163. For the English translation, *Saga of Magnus*, in *The saga of Hacon*, translated by George W. Dasent. Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset: Llanerch Publishers, 1977: 374–387.

116 “Sverris saga,” by L. Holm-Olsen. KLN M Vol. XVII, 551–558.

117 “Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar,” by Knut Helle. KLN M Vol. VI, 51–53; “Magnus lagabøters saga,” by Finn Hødnebo. KLN M Vol. XI, 237–238.

118 Ottar Dahl. 1990. *Norsk historieskrivning I det 19. og 20. Århundre*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget; Ottar Dahl. 1974. *Historisk materialisme. Historieoppfatningen hos Edvard Bull og Halvdan Koht*. 2nd edition. Oslo: Aschehoug; Úlfar Bragason. 2005. “Sagas of Contemporary History (Sturlungs sagas): Texts and Research.” In Rory McTurk (ed.) *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. Blackwell Publishing: 427–446.

ideal sources of information about the medieval society and culture they depicted, whereas normative material was believed to reflect norms to a lesser degree and to be of programmatic character. Recently the debate has flared up again, more particularly in regard to the issue of state-making, owing to Hans Jacob Orning's thesis on high medieval royal power in 13th-century Norway.¹¹⁹

Because they were written shortly after the events took place and because they were based on the testimony of eye-witnesses and even written documents, the kings' sagas are believed to give a quite respectful and reliable narrative.¹²⁰ However, being commissioned by the royal power for the purpose of exalting the dynasty (*Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss*) or as a weapon of propaganda (*Grýla* in the *Sverris saga*), the veracity and fidelity of the sagas to reality cannot be taken at face value. Some episodes and events may have been altered and embellished in order to provide a favorable image of the rulers and of their policies. Moreover, we must also expect some form of censure from the commissioner, who may have required the omission of problematic and negative issues.

The period examined saw the emergence of both centralized administration and administrative literacy. Yet very little authoritative work has been done on high medieval diplomas, in particular in the field of state formation.¹²¹ However, during the past last twenty or thirty years, a comprehensive international scholarship on Diplomats has provided valuable insights concerning charters and diplomas as sources for ideologies and perceptions of power. If traditionally diplomatic acts were perceived as subject to stereotypical and serial conventions that alienated any dimension as source of history, it is now a truism that charters and diplomas were suitable means of communication and of propaganda.¹²²

119 See also the debate which took place in the Norwegian *Historisk Tidsskrift*, H.J. Orning. 2005. "Den materielle basis for den norske kongemaktens utvikling i høymiddelalderen." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 84 nr. 3: 455–69; Orning 2010a, 143–168.

120 Narve Bjørge. 1967. "Om skriftlege kjelder for Hákonar saga." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 46: 185–229.

121 Some exceptions are the works of Johan Agerholt and Lars Hamre which, although being largely outdated in view of the new developments in the field of diplomatic studies, still give thorough and detailed descriptions of the formulaic conventions of medieval Norwegian diplomas and their evolution through time. Johan Agerholt. 1932. *Gamalt Brevskipnad. Etterøkjinger og Utgreidingar i Norsk Diplomatiikk*. I & II, Oslo: J. Chr. Gundersen Boktrykkeri; Lars Hamre. 1972. *Innføring i diplomatiikk. Forelesningar*. Oslo.

122 A comprehensive literature exists on the topic. I will here just name few central works. Olivier Guyotjeannin, Pycke J. & Tock B-M. 2006. *Diplomatique Médiévale*. Brepols; Marie Th. Flanagan & Green J.A. (ed.) 2005. *Charters and Charter Scholarship in Britain and*

The Norwegian diplomatic and legal material used in this study is compiled in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* vol. I–XXII and in *Corpus codicum Norvegicorum medii aevi*.¹²³ The *Regesta Norvegica* vol. 1–4 gives also a good chronological survey as well as a short summary of diplomas written before 1350.¹²⁴ Despite their obvious importance as media of royal communication, the present study only addresses royal diplomas and charters to a limited extent. The main reason for this omission lies in the paradoxical situation of diplomatic production and the specific difficulties for the analysis of the Norwegian corpus. The corpus of diplomas and charters is very unevenly distributed for the period examined (1150–1300). In the first half of the 13th century, the existence of only a few dozen of documents is attested. In addition, most documents from this period lack basic information about dates and authorship. After the mid-13th century however, diplomatic production takes off.¹²⁵ Although remaining modest in comparison to other countries, the number of acts issued by the crown increased exponentially, reaching several hundred.¹²⁶

Finally, this study will not treat iconographic material, although pictures, sculptures and paintings were important channels of communication for the Norwegian kingship. Only royal seals will be examined, but only superficially.

Ireland. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Claude Fagnen. 1984. "Le vocabulaire du pouvoir dans les actes de Richard Cœur de Lion, Duc de Normandie (1189–1199)." In *Les pouvoirs de commandements jusqu'à 1610*. Actes du 105^e congrès national des sociétés savantes. Caen 1980, tome 1. Paris: 79–93; Karl Heidecker. 2000. *Charters and the use of the written word in medieval society*. Utrecht studies in medieval literacy 5. Brepols; Nanna Damsholt. 1977. "Kingship in the arengas of Danish Royal Diplomas 1140–1223." *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, nr.3. Odense University Press: 66–85; Heinrich Fichtenau. 1956–1957. "Monarchische Propaganda in Urkunden." *Bullettino dell'Archivio Paleografico Italiano*, nuova serie 2–3. Roma.

123 *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* I–XXII. *Oldbreve til Kunskaab om Norges indre og ydre Forhold, Sprog, Slægter, Sæder, Lovgivning og Rettergang i Middelalderen*, Oslo 1849–1976. *Corpus codicum Norvegicorum medii aevi*. Folio serie, vol. 2. Edited by Finn Hødnebo. Oslo 1960.

124 *Regesta Norvegica*. Edition Storm G. Christiana, 1898.

125 See in Bagge 2010a, 245–256.

126 *Ibid.*, 248.

A Genesis under Church Control

1 Introduction

The second half of the 12th century was foundational in the making of royal communication in high medieval Norway. It was a formative period in the definition of the premises for the future development of the Norwegian kingship's communication. First, it sanctioned the role of two major actors of communication: the kingship itself and the Church. It also saw the development of new concepts and ideas from which Norwegian kings drew their political legitimacy: a monarchy of divine origin. The period was also decisive in the development of the means through which these ideologies were transmitted. A set of religious rituals and ceremonies took form and imposed itself as central medium of communication. The most remarkable development however was the rise of literate culture and the use of the written word. At the core of these processes was a double context: the combined development of the royal and ecclesiastic institutions, and the civil war (1130–1240).

Under the reign of King Magnus Erlingsson (1163–1184), the crown increasingly affirmed itself as the greatest lay authority in Norwegian society. The rise of the royalty was obvious on an institutional level with the (albeit limited) development of a central administration centred on the *hirð* and a network of local royal agents known as *sýsselman* (Steward). The enforcement of royal power was intermittent and varied from region to region. It also concerned the domains of finance, with the creation of new taxes, and justice, through the making of laws.¹ Norwegian royal power also extended beyond the Norwegian realm. From the end of the 11th century, a number of territories in the North Atlantic (the Hebrides, the Orkneys, the Isle of Man, the Shetland and the Faroes) came under the sway of Norwegian royal power, although they were subject to the crown's direct control to different degrees.²

The second major development concerns the foundation of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53. The new church province, *Provincia Nidrosiensis*, had

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- 1 On the consolidation of the Norwegian kingship under King Magnus Erlingsson see, Helle 1964, 36–47; Bagge 2010; Helle 2003, 369–391; Andreas Holmsen & Jarle Simensen. (1969) 1983. *Samfunnsmaktene Brytes. Norske Historikere i Utvalg 11*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget: 97–314.
 - 2 Wærdahl 2011; Imsen 2010; Jon Vidar Sigurdsson. 2008. *Det norrøne samfunnet. Vikingen, kongen, erkebiskopen og bonden*. Pax Forlag A/S: 102–116;

Nidaros as its metropolis and included the 5 sees of Nidaros, Bergen, Stavanger, Oslo and Hamar and those of the Western Isles of Skálholt and Holar in Iceland, Gardar in Greenland, the Faroes, the Orkneys, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man and Shetland.³ Although the kingdom of Norway officially adopted the Christian religion in the early 11th century, the foundation of the archbishopric greatly consolidated ecclesiastic territorial organization, wealth and spiritual hold on northern men and women, and elevated the Norwegian Church to a new and powerful actor in the political landscape of Norway.⁴ Moreover, the foundation of 1152/53 introduced a new major power in culture and communication in Norway. The structural improvements enabled the Norwegian church for the first time to fully exploit its expertise and technology in ritualistic and written communication in the Norwegian context. It also made it possible for the Norwegian clergy to affirm itself as a mediator of knowledge and culture between Christian Europe and Norway.

The rise of kingship and the Church in the mid-12th century unfolded in the unstable political context of the civil war (1130–1240) which saw different pretenders competing for royal power.⁵ Under King Magnus Erlingsson (1163–1184), the two powers made an alliance aiming to consolidate their respective positions.⁶ This political association boosted the elaboration of a communication system meant to sustain the legitimacy of the Norwegian kingship. In the following we will identify the components of the communication system as well as their respective development and contribution to the consolidation of the Norwegian monarchy. The Church's extensive control over the means of ritualistic and written communication made the alliance culturally asymmetrical and resulted in an ascendancy of the Norwegian clergy over kings. Through a detailed examination of ritual staging and of charter and literature production, we will shed light on how the Church transformed its cultural hegemony into political domination.

The period examined is the second half of the 12th century, in particular the reign of King Magnus Erlingsson (1163–1184). However, there will be two digressions from the chapter's chronological scope. First, the reign of King Sverre (1177–1202) will be the object of specific treatment in consideration of its decisive importance in the making of a royal communication system (Chapter 11). Furthermore, the examination of two rituals of kingship (*konungstekja* and

3 Imsen 2012a; Imsen 2003.

4 Andersen 1977, 301–338; Peter Sawyer & Birgit Sawyer. 1993a. *Medieval Scandinavia. From Conversion to Reformation circa 800–1500*. University of Minnesota Press: 100–128.

5 Helle 1964, 20–47; Bagge 2010, 40ff.

6 Helle 1964, 37.

trial by ordeals) will slightly exceed the chronological limits, and will lead us to also cover the first decades of the 13th century up to 1240.

2 Rituals of Succession

The growing ascendancy of the Church over the Norwegian kingship and its increasing control over the means for royal communication in particular is particularly blatant in the rituals of succession. This section aims to explore the role played by rituals of succession in the communication system of the Norwegian kingship during the period of the civil war (1130–1240). In particular it examines how the Norwegian Church exerted its control over the Norwegian kingship through both traditional and new rituals.

Royal succession was a central issue of Norwegian politics during the entire High Middle Ages. It was *a fortiori* the case during the civil war when competition raged between royal candidates. During the period examined, two systems of succession came into conflict. The traditional system, which dominated in the Early Middle Ages, allowed the sharing of the kingship between different royal heirs. Traditionally, accession to the crown occurred solely through the ritual of the *konungstekja*, the acclamation of the king by the regional assemblies of the *þing*. In the mid-12th century however, the Church imported a new ritual which had long been common in continental monarchies, but which was totally absent from Scandinavia: the crowning and anointment of a king.

The Church's hold on royal succession also concerned the *konungstekja*. In the wake of the crowning of Magnus, a *Law of Royal Succession* (1163) established Nidaros and its Cathedral as the locus of royal election. The introduction of royal coronations and the law did not make the ritual of *konungstekja* obsolete. Indeed, while not every successor of Magnus was crowned king, all were elected at the assemblies. Over the course of the 12th and 13th century, the Church also increased its control over the *konungstekja* as Christian liturgy progressively was introduced into the ceremony. Finally, the issue of royal succession was not only topical at the start of a new reign. During the period of the civil war, kings' legitimacy was repeatedly challenged by competing candidates. The sagas report a religious ritual used on several occasions by kings and candidates to prove the righteousness of their claims: trial by ordeal.

The growing hold of the Norwegian clergy over rituals of succession was the result of several processes. On the one hand it is possible to identify this control as part of a conscious strategy. Archbishop Eystein Erlendsson (1158–1188) was a key figure in the creation of a systematic and global enterprise of communication in Norway. During his episcopate, Eystein developed,

often through direct patronage, an important literary production of histories and hagiographies.⁷ He also personally stood behind the provincial statutes (*canones nidrosiensis*).⁸ He developed the liturgy (*Ordo Nidrosiensis*)⁹ and directly supervised the extension of Nidaros Cathedral.¹⁰ When the Norwegian kingship faltered in war of succession, he actively engaged to bring the royal institution back to stability under Gregorian principles. Eystein's commitment and leadership has been readily emphasized in the modern historiography. Erik Gunnes assumes that Eystein had "political-religious visions" for the realm of Norway and "a thought of *rex iustus* [...] that needed to be realized through concrete measures."¹¹ Finally, Andås sees a program revealing the archbishop's "religious and political ambitions "in the iconography of the Cathedral's architecture and the rituals performed."¹² Except for Archbishop Eystein, who certainly had a universal vision of the role of the Church in the Kingdom of Norway and endeavored to bring it about, generally speaking we can scarcely detect a master plan with the ultimate aim to establish a theocracy in Norway. Eystein's successors largely failed to follow in his tracks. Yet the developments that we will outline in the following show that ecclesiastic influence upon rituals of succession grew in the early 13th century, several decades after Eystein's death. The increase of clerical influence in some fields also was the result of an uncontrolled development. Thus, although he acknowledges Eystein's commitment, Johan Schreiner identified a deeper current that exceeded the limits of the Norwegian kingdom. In his view the coronation of Magnus Erlingsson in 1163, as well as those of his neighbors,

7 Lars B. Mortensen & Else Mundal. 2003. "Erkebispesetet i Nidaros – arnstad og verkstad for olavslitteraturen." in Imsen 2003: 353–385; Lars B. Mortensen. 2012. "Eystein and Passio Olavi: author, editor or project leader?" in *Eystein Erlendsson-Erkebiskop, politiker og kirkebygger*. NIDAROS Domkirkes restaureringsarbeider: 77–85; Erik Gunnes. 1996. *Erkebiskop Øystein. Statsmann og kirkebygger*. Aschehoug: 191–221.

8 Vegard Skånland. 1969. *Det eldste norske provinsialstatutt*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget: 181 ff; Tore Iversen (ed.) 2011. *Archbishop Eystein as Legislator. The European Connection*. Rostra books. Tapir Academic Press.

9 Roman Hankeln. 2012. "Eysteins liturgi og dens europeiske musikk." in *Eystein Erlendsson-Erkebiskop, politiker og kirkebygger*. NIDAROS Domkirkes restaureringsarbeider: 135–147; Lilli Gjerløw (ed.). 1968. *Ordo Nidrosiensis ecclesiae*. Orðubók.

10 Stuart Harrison. 2012. "The Cathedral of Archbishop Eystein: Sequences, Style, Dating and Influences." in *Eystein Erlendsson-Erkebiskop, politiker og kirkebygger*. NIDAROS Domkirkes restaureringsarbeider: 97–111.

11 Gunnes 1996, 130.

12 Margrete S. Andås. 2008. "Art and Ritual in the Liminal Zone." in M.S. Andås et al. (ed.) *The Medieval Cathedral of Trondheim*. Brepols: 123.

Valdemar I in Denmark (1170) and Erik Knutsson in Sweden (1210), were products of the Church's growing involvement in the process of royal succession in Europe. These ideas were so systematically and widely promoted by the European clergy and the papacy that they can readily be considered part of a broader program.¹³

The successful introduction of new religious rituals as well as the sacralization of traditional rituals of royal succession was also the result of a long, slow process of acculturation stemming directly from the organizational development of the Church on a local and central level. Following the creation of the Norwegian church province in 1152/53, Christian doctrines and ideas constantly gained ground in society. The tighter network of churches made it possible for a large part of the population to go to mass to receive the teachings of the Bible and to go to confession. Christian views on death, piety, forgiveness, marriage and sexuality were adopted in Norwegian culture and society, although conservative trends remained strong.¹⁴ As a sign of the penetration of Christian teachings, the cult of saints and in particular around the relics of St Olav – which we will see played its part in the Church's increasing influence over rituals – developed in Norway.¹⁵ The progress of Christianity thus paved the way for the adoption and use of religious symbols, gestures and relics in spaces and rituals that were not Christian originally.

Tradition: Konungstekja

The traditional system of royal succession in Norway was the *konungstekja*: the 'taking' of kings. It was largely inspired by Germanic principles; kings were chosen among families believed to possess special qualities (origin, spiritual/magical). The sole requirement was that candidates had to be men of royal descent. There was no restriction concerning the age or the degree of kinship of the claimant: legitimate and illegitimate children had equal rights. Given that there was no single royal dynasty in Norway, there could be many claimants, which indeed was often the case. However, the kingship could be shared and several kings from different kin could cohabitate in the kingdom.

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- 13 Johan Schreiner. 1946-48a. "De Første Kongekroningene i Norden." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol 34, Oslo: 518-534.
 - 14 Sverre Bagge. 2000. *Mennesket i Middelalderens Norge. Tanker, tro og holdninger 1000-1300*. Aschehoug: 75-146; Arnved Nedkvitne. 1997. *Møtet med døden i norrøn middelalder. En mentalitetshistorisk studie*. Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.
 - 15 Øystein Ekroll. 2012. "The cult of St. Olav in the Norse cultural sphere – and outside it." in Imsen 2012: 45-66.

The assembly of the *þing* was the institution which chose who was best fitted to be king.¹⁶

Although *konungstekja* was repeated over several hundred years, we know little about its staging. The little information we have stems from 13th-century source material, that is, in a period in which the ritual had already been altered by the late developments of the 12th century. The main sources for Norway are Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and the *Hirðskrá* (1274–1277), which offers the first written regulation of the ritual. The material suggests that the ceremonial of the *konungstekja* obeyed definite rules for how the claimant was elected.

The rite started with the candidate summoning the local *þing*. The saga literature abounds in examples of this: in 1015, in Olav Haraldsson's case "the kings summoned a *þing*, and there King Olav set forth this determination to all the people and his demand on the kingly power."¹⁷ King Magnus Olafsson was hailed king after he "summoned the people to the *Eyraping* and when the bondes met at the *þing*, Magnus was taken to be king over the whole land."¹⁸ The sagas never mention how the *þing* was summoned in such occasions, but usually *þings* were gathered by blowing horns or ringing church bells. In preparation for the ritual, the locus of the consecration was "sanctified;" a fire was carried around the borders of the site in order to delimit a sector of inviolability. Then the candidate was led to a high seat erected on top of a constructed mound where he asked the assembly to take him as king.¹⁹

The written sources give no detailed account of the contender's demand. It was most probably a speech where the candidate detailed his royal lineage. With no automatic succession order, no claimant from the same family as the former king was certain to be chosen. He needed therefore to convince the assembly of his ability to rule. To do this he may have expounded upon his personal qualities and achievements and the legality of his claims. As exemplified in the saga of Håkon the Good, the contender also could make promises to the audience.²⁰ However, he could also be assisted in his presentation. Close and powerful chiefs could speak and promote the candidate. Rounds of discussions and deliberation ensued. A decision was taken, and if the pretender was

16 Elizabeth Vestergaard. 1990. "A Note on Viking Age Inaugurations." in János M. Bak (ed.) *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 119.

17 *OH*, Ch. 35.

18 *MG*, Ch. 3.

19 Alexander Taranger. 1934–1936. "Om kongevalg i Norge i Sagatiden." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.), Vol. 30. Oslo: 120–124; Vestergaard 1990, 119–124.

20 *HG*, Ch. 1.

chosen he was acclaimed by the assembly with clashing arms and raising of hands. Finally, the newly elected king swore an oath to the assembly. The documentary sources do not refer to or suggest the performance of religious pagan rituals or the presence of priests or religious actors during the ritual.

In the *konungstekja*, royal succession was a legal procedure typical of an oral society; it was based on direct and interpersonal communication. The claimant had to show up personally, with witnesses *en masse*, and probably had to make the demand himself in an address to the assembly. The acclamation or the rejection of the candidate by the popular gathering was a demonstrative gesture which aimed to create a visual and auditory impact on the attendants. The very public character of the ritual conferred legality and validity upon the election. As direct contact between the king and the population was the prerequisite condition for royal succession to be enforced, the newly elected king necessarily needed to reproduce the ritual in every major regional *þing* in order to meet the whole population.²¹

Innovation: The Crowning of Magnus Erlingsson

The crowning of King Magnus Erlingsson in 1163 is an important milestone in the history of royal coronations in the High Middle Ages. As the first crowning of a Norwegian king, it introduced a totally new ritual of royal succession. Despite its significance however, the ceremony in itself has not been examined in great detail. Norwegian royal coronations in general have been a neglected subject for several decades. Hertzberg's seminal study in 1905 on Magnus Erlingsson's coronation was not followed until quite recently with the work of Erich Hoffmann, Grethe Authén Blom and Sverre Bagge in the late 1980s.²² Coronation ceremonies were treated indirectly in the larger scope of general meetings in Helle's *Konge og Gode Menn*.²³ It must be conceded that the event

21 Vestergaard 1990, 119–124.

22 Ebbe Hertzberg. 1905/1906. "Den Første Norske Kongekroning, dens Aarstal og Ledsagende omstændigheder." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Fjerde rekke, Vol. 3: 27–171; Sverre Bagge. 1985. "Herrens salvede. Kroning og salving i norsk kongeideologi 1163–1247." in M. Blindheim *et al.* (red.) *Kongens Makt og Ære. Skandinaviske herskersymboler gjennom 1000 år*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget: 29–33.; Grete A. Blom. 1985. "Kongekroninger og kroningsutstyr i norsk middelalder frem til 1300-årene." in M. Blindheim, P. Gjørder, D. Sæverud (red.) *Kongens Makt og Ære. Skandinaviske herskersymboler gjennom 1000 år*. Oslo: Universitetets Oldsaksamling: 71–76; Erich Hoffmann. 1990. "Coronation and Coronation Ordinances in Medieval Scandinavia." in Bak, János M. (ed.) *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 125–131.

23 Knut Helle. 1972. *Konge & Gode Menn I norsk riksstyring ca. 1150–1319*. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget: 118–122.

of 1163 is not easy to grasp. The only written account of the ceremony stems from Snorri's *Heimskringla*, which was written in the early 13th century, nearly sixty years afterwards. While the saga gives a detailed picture of the political circumstances around the coronation's organization, it remains quite sober in its description of the ritual itself.

In the early 1160s, Erling Skakke was the most powerful man in Norway. He had defeated his main rivals on the battlefield, but he had no claim to the title of king as he had no royal blood in his veins. However, his young son and newly elected king, Magnus, had. Magnus was of royal descent upon the side of his mother, Kristin Sigurd's daughter (1125–1178), daughter of Sigurd the Crusader (1090–1130). However, this was not enough to meet the established legal conventions, which required patrilineal succession. Despite his blatant lack of legitimacy, Magnus was hailed king at the *Gulaping* in 1161. Magnus's authority remained disputed, however, and he needed a new, powerful boost. In his struggle for power Erling had been able to count on the support of the Church. In 1161, Magnus had already been hailed king with the consent of the Norwegian clergy. It was towards the Church that Erling now chose to turn. In the summer of 1163, he and archbishop Eystein met in Bergen and agreed to crown and anoint Magnus. Such a consecration would provide Magnus with a decisive advantage over his competitors.

The crowning ceremony occurred in Bergen in Christ Church. The date of the ceremony has been debated. Hertzberg's estimation of summer 1163 has long been accepted. A precise date for the ceremony is given in Bergen's Chronicle in verse, which dates from 1560–1580. The coronation ceremony took place *paa sancti Laurits dag*, the day of St Laurence, 10th August.²⁴

The coronation ceremony is depicted in Magnus Erlingsson's saga from Snorri's *Heimskringla*. The account of the ceremony is brief and does not provide any detailed description of how the ceremony itself was carried out or about the celebrations before and after the crowning.

Erling Skakke then had a great feast prepared in the king's house. The large hall was covered with costly cloth and tapestry, and adorned with great expense. The court-men and all the attendants were there entertained, and there were numerous guests, and many chiefs. Then King Magnus received the royal consecration from the Archbishop Eystein; and at the consecration there were five other bishops and the legate, besides a number of other clergy. Erling Skakke, and with him twelve other *lendermen*, administered to the king the oath of the law; and the

24 Hertzberg 1905/1906, 45–50.

day of the consecration the king and Erling had the legate, the archbishop, and all the other bishops as guests; and the feast was exceedingly magnificent, and the father and son distributed many great presents.²⁵

The ceremony was thus preceded by a great feast prepared in the king's house, to which all the king's lay guests were invited. These included the elite of the aristocracy; the king's retinue, the *hirð*, many chiefs and also "numerous guests," probably from the political and economic elite of Bergen. We can also take for granted that the royal family were counted among the guests. It is said that the attendees was "entertained," which conjecturally means that they were provided with food, drinks, and entertainment (music and shows).

Although we have no precise knowledge of the procedure of consecration in the church and in particular which *ordo* the ceremony followed, Hoffmann assumes that the German *ordo*, which was the most widespread *ordo* in Western Europe, served as model for royal coronations in 12th century Norway.²⁶ The legate Stephanus of Orvieto may have contributed to the organizing of the procedure. We know little of his movements and doings, but as bishop and papal legate he may well have been acquainted with *Ordines Coronationis* and brought his knowledge to the arrangement of the ceremony. We can also assume that Eystein was involved in the staging. Scholars believe that before he received the *pallium* in 1158, he studied abroad in France (Paris) and England (Lincoln) during the 1140s and 1150s.²⁷ There was no royal crowning in France at that time; Louis VII had been consecrated in 1137 and Philip II Augustus was not crowned before 1179. But as we will see, there must have been a strong connection between the archbishop and the reform milieus in Paris where the Norwegian may have become familiar with the Capetian coronation *ordo*.²⁸ On the other hand, the English king, Henry II, was crowned in December

25 *Erlingr skakki lét búa í konungsgarði til veizlu mikillar, ok var höll hin mikla tjölduð þellum ok bakklæðum, ok búin með hinum mesta kostnaði. Var þar veitt hirðinni ok öllum handgengnum mönnum; þar var fjöldi boðsmanna ok margir höfðingjar. Magnús tók þá konungsvígslu af Eysteini erkibyskupi, ok þar vátu at vígslunni aðrir 5 byskupar ok legatinn ok fjöldi kennimanna. Erlingr skakki ok með honum 12 lendir menn sóru lagaeiða með konungi. Ok þann dag, er vígslan var, hafði konungr ok Erlingr í boði sínu erkibyskup ok legatann ok alla byskupa, ok var sú veizla hin veggamligsta; gáfu þeir feðgar þar margar stórgjafir.* (ME, Ch. 22).

26 Hoffmann 1990, 130.

27 Gunnes 1996, 31–40; Ann J. Duggan. 2011. "Eystein and the World of the Learned Law." in Iversen 2011: 23–30.

28 The coronation *ordo* that was used in Capetian France between 1150 and 1200 is known as the *Ordo* of Senlis or *Ordo* of St-Bertin. Both were abbeys from Northern France, but that

1154 in Westminster Abbey. Could Eystein have been witness to the event and staged the ceremony of Bergen on the English model?

Snorri refers to *konungsvígslu*, “a consecration.” As Hoffmann has argued, the term must imply crowning, anointing and the investiture with regalia.²⁹ The *Sverris saga* gives a clearer indication of the crown and Magnus’s anointment. When Sverre sacked the town of Bergen in 1184, he surprised Magnus and came into possession of “the crown and gold wand which he carried when he was anointed king and all the coronation robes.”³⁰ We do not know where these objects came from. Apparently Erling and Eystein had very little time to have a crown or crowns made, as a letter of privileges (1163–1177) suggests.³¹ Some may have existed in Norway before 1163. Hoffmann rightly reminds us of a stone sculpture of King Eystein Magnusson (1103–1123), who bears a crown on his head.³²

Snorri tells us that the consecration was performed by Archbishop Eystein with five bishops. From the *Biskupa Sögur*, we know for certain that bishop Brand of the Icelandic see of Hólar was among them.³³ The text also mentions “a number of other clergy;” maybe the clerical population of Bergen and of the monastic institutions of the region. In addition, the papal legate Stephen of Urbe Veteri also attended the ceremony, although we do not know for sure which role he played in the crowning.

Following the consecration, the newly anointed king swore a crowning oath where he promised to protect the Church and pledged obedience to the Pope. Due to the king’s young age (probably 7 years), it was presided over by the king’s father, Earl Erling, aided by twelve *lendmenn*. The text of the oath is referred to recurrently throughout the 13th century. The oath of Magnus was the model the Church systematically tried to impose upon kings before their coronation. The oath was in Latin and may have been declaimed by Erling. Although there were no clerics involved in this specific part, the rite still remained highly religious. The text of the coronation oath tells us that the king took his oath on relics: *Ego rex Magnus promitto et iuro per patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum et per has reliquias sanctorum*.³⁴ We do not know whose

belonged to the archdiocese of Reims. Richard A. Jackson (ed.) 1995. *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, Vol. 1. University of Pennsylvania Press: 240–247.

29 Hoffmann 1990, 126.

30 *coronuna oc gullvondin er hann vígðr með oc allt vígflu-feruð hanf* (SvS, Ch. 78).

31 *NgL I*, 442–444.

32 Hoffmann 1990, 128.

33 *BS I*, 83.

34 Erik Vandvik. 1959. *Latinske Dokument til Norsk Historie*. Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, nr. 10, 62.

relics these were, as Christ Church in Bergen did not house relics before 1170. The relics of St Olav would have suited the ceremony perfectly as a letter of privileges and the *Law of Royal Succession* issued shortly after not only mention the saint, but also directly address him. However, no transfer of relics from Nidaros to Bergen is indicated in our sources, and it hardly could have gone unnoticed if it occurred. Finally, a banquet concluded the celebrations. We do not know whether the author failed to mention the lay attendance at this final feast or whether it means that the party was reserved for the clergy. Snorri again insists on the splendour of the banquet, where many costly presents were given to the guests.³⁵

Redealing the Cards

The crowning of Magnus Erlingsson was the masterpiece that would symbolize the collaboration between the kingship and the Church. Nonetheless, the ceremony was meant to be more than a simple display of this relationship. The staging of the rituals not only mirrored the relation of power between the king and society; it also shaped it. In introducing the coronation ceremony, the crown and the Church created a new arena for communication with society that deeply modified the balance of power in Norwegian society. The religious ceremony itself and the festivities that were arranged outside it established new premises for the dialogue between the two major powers and society – including new premises for dominance.

The crowning of Magnus Erlingsson had been the result of a bargain and it is clear that the agreement secured mutual benefits for both parties. The introduction of coronations was highly profitable for the kingship as it provided a new set of legitimizing means: a new foundation for royal authority over society, a new arena and new devices (insignia) to express it at will. Although Norwegian kings still relied on the *konungstekja* and popular sanction to be elected king, with the coronation and anointment, the king now received his power and authority from God. The ritual symbolized the passage from the human condition to the sacred state and made the king a *rex Dei gratia*, a king by the grace of God. The king's divine legitimacy provided Magnus Erlingsson with a unique political advantage over other claimants as the sacrament could not be shared. Moreover, with the coronation and unction the king enjoyed personal inviolability. Any challengers who attempted to depose the king exposed themselves to harsh punishments.

The coronation ceremony provided the crown with a new arena to demonstrate its legitimacy. The *konungstekja* was an open-air ritual that occurred on

35 ME, Ch. 22.

the site of the *þing*. Although the location also served for other purposes, it was sanctified through specific rites for the specific purpose of the election. The coronation ceremony took place within the sacred precinct of the church. The building was the main structure for religious worship, specifically designed to perform the rituals of Christianity. It also was a sacred place invested with the spirit of God. The coronation ceremony offered the king a device shaped to exhibit a divine performance.

How powerful and impressive this performance was to its audience, it occurred only once.³⁶ However, the coronation supplied the kingship with symbols to express its divine legitimacy and authority at will. During the coronation ceremony the king was given symbolic emblems of his authority, the royal insignia. Snorri's description does not provide detail of the presentation of insignia. During the ceremony, royal insignia were coronation "instruments," given to the king during specific steps of the ritual in order to symbolize the different aspects of his sacred authority. The coronation robes marked royal authority.³⁷ They usually included richly coloured vestments: a tunic, leggings and shoes.³⁸ The crown, which was essential during the ritual of coronation, also symbolised royal authority, whereas the sceptre symbolized one of the king's most important and sacred functions, his right to mete out justice.³⁹ However, these objects not only fulfilled a function during the ceremony. They were portable objects of representation meant to exalt the divine character of crown in other contexts. As G.A. Blom rightly observed, if King Magnus Erlingsson needed all the legitimacy that the crowning could provide for political purposes, he ought to have borne these insignia "in official occasions, like at the *þing*, during meetings and banquets."⁴⁰ I would also add the ritual of solemn entries into towns, where the king and his retinue were solemnly met by a procession (see III, 7). However, although there were ample opportunities for the king to use the insignia, the sagas do not mention their presence systematically, sometimes even when a very detailed account is given. The sole instance is the aforementioned one when King Sverre seized

36 We will see later that a coronation ceremony probably took place earlier in Nidaros. (see I, 4).

37 The German scholar Percy Schramm has thoroughly investigated the significance of the coronation *insignias*; see Percy E. Schramm. 1956. *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik. Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte vom dritten bis zum sechzehnten Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart.

38 R.M. Wooley. 1915. *Coronation Rites*. Cambridge University Press.

39 Éric Palazzo. 2001. "La liturgie du sacre." in J. Le Goff, É. Palazzo, J-C. Bonne, M-N. Colette (ed.) *Le sacre royal à l'époque de Saint Louis*. Paris: Gallimard: 61 ff.

40 Blom 1985, 72.

Magnus's royal insignia.⁴¹ This shows at least that the king kept them with him during his travels.

The import of the ceremony of royal coronation into Norway increased the Church's power over royal succession. Until the mid-12th century, the Church did not play a central role in the process of succession. It was the lay aristocracy and the local magnates who made the kings. The clergy was certainly represented during the ceremony of the *konungstekja*, but no clerics played a privileged role in any stages of the election. Royal coronations however brought royal succession onto clerical ground. The ceremony of coronation was a succession of religious rituals (anointment, crowning, and oath) accomplished in a church, i.e. in the very core of the clerical institution. It was chiefly performed by prominent clerics, archbishop, papal legates and bishops with whom laymen were associated, but these always remained under the close supervision of churchmen.

The issue of location for the ceremony of royal coronation is essential. Snorri's account lists two places: the royal palace and the coronation church. In this system of locations, the church played the chief role. As Le Goff points out, the coronation church is not only the receptacle of the ritual, but also established in its space the localisation of each of its stages.⁴²

The church was the location of the clergy's sacred power. The clergy played multiple complex roles in the ceremony. As intermediaries between God and men, clerics led the ritual of consecration. Archbishop Eystein was the one who crowned and anointed King Magnus by the altar. He was assisted in his task by bishops. Medieval liturgical *ordines* ascribed bishops important tasks, from the swearing of oaths and the bearing of insignia to the participation in the different processions which accompanied the king within the church.⁴³ However, the role of clerics in the ceremony went beyond purely "technical" participation. The coronation redefined the relationship between the king and the clergy. The clergy's performance provided the bishops with an opportunity to negotiate new rights and privileges from the crown from a position of strength. Over the following centuries, the Norwegian clergy was to duly exercise this advantage at every occasion.

The coronation ceremony proper also emphasized the new relationship between the king and the magnates. As we saw, during the ceremony of the *konungstekja* the magnates played an active and important role in the process

41 SvS, Ch. 78.

42 Jacques Le Goff. 2001b. "La Structure et le Contenu Idéologique de la Cérémonie du Sacre." in Jacques Le Goff et al. (eds.) *Le sacre royal à l'époque de Saint Louis*. Paris: Gallimard: 25.

43 Palazzo 2001, 37–89.

of election; they spoke for the candidate, presenting his qualities and assuring the truth of his claims. In putting their personal authority and prestige into the balance they functioned as guarantors for the king's legitimacy. The coronation ceremony however relegated them to the rank of secondary actors both politically and physically. They did not actively participate in the coronation rite and the unction, which was supervised exclusively by the bishops. Yet they formed the main bulk of the attendees in the church and as such constituted the main target of the ceremonial ideology. True, they were associated with the ceremony of the oath, but this by no way was specifically aimed at them, but at the church and *populo mihi subdito maioribus et minoribus*, "the people who are my subjects, high and low."⁴⁴ The support of the aristocracy remained crucial for the new king and Earl Erling, however. While the coronation largely compensated for Magnus's lack of legitimacy, his failure to meet the traditional criteria for kingship most certainly was still a motive for problems with the old class of magnates. Although Magnus's acclamation had been supported by the aristocrats loyal to Erling, their loyalty needed to be secured on every occasion. The coronation ceremony and the festivities surrounding it offered Erling and his son many opportunities to do so. The first opportunity was during the banquets which preceded and followed the ceremony. These festivities were not particular to royal coronations. The sagas clearly show that they were also common at the rituals of *konungstekja*. In both cases, they offered the king and the aristocracy ideal opportunities for discussions and negotiations. In a context of political strife, old alliances could be strengthened and new ones could be made. The practice of give costly presents to the attendees at the end, which is also attested in the accounts of *konungstekja*, was a tool in the political game that proceeded during the banquets. It was meant to sanction the new relationship by rewarding guests for their friendship and support. But in Bergen in summer 1163, the celebrations were magnified by the central event of the king's coronation, which offered him a favourable environment for his communication and consigned the lay aristocracy to mere spectators and foils to the king's grandeur.

Kåre Lunden qualified the crowning of King Håkon Håkonsson in 1247 as "a play for the people."⁴⁵ However, on the basis of Snorri's account, we must admit that the presence of commoners was very limited throughout the entire happening. Physically, this political relegation found its expression in expelling the commoners from the locus of coronation. Christ Church was probably too small to welcome a crowd of commoners. At best, a group of representatives of

44 *Ibid.*

45 «Fremfor alt fikk folket overvære en skuespill» (Lunden 1976, 379) (Author's translation).

the people may have been present in the church, but the saga does not indicate a popular audience at any stage of the events. The commoners' participation was most probably reduced to the role of spectators of the royal processions which we assume escorted the king from the king's house to the church, which was only one hundred meters away, and from the Church back to the king's palace. The procession to the coronation church, the moment when the king climbed the stairs and crossed its threshold, is thoroughly regulated in 12th-century *ordines*.⁴⁶ The king was accompanied by chants recited by clerics and the archbishop with his bishops went out from the church to meet the king.⁴⁷ The departure of the king from the church was not likely regulated, but the visual impression which the new king made on the people outside was certainly a high point for the audience.

Appropriating Public Acclamation

According to Snorri, it was not Archbishop Eystein who initiated Magnus's coronation, but Erling. The earl was inspired by foreign example: "let us also have a crowned king, as well as the Danes and Englishmen."⁴⁸ Even if Eystein was not the initiator, he was not reluctant to fully exploit this opportunity to establish a program for the development of a Christian monarchy in Norway. As we have seen, the introduction of coronations gave the Church a strong hold over the process of royal succession. Nonetheless, while royal coronations brought a new ritual and a new means of legitimacy, crowning was not prerequisite to the kingship, and royal succession in Norway still rested on the traditional *konungstekja*.

How did the Church envisage a ritual which it did not control? Were there any ambitions to make the ceremony of coronation the sole and unique ritual of royal succession? The mere fact that the introduction of coronations in 1163 did not make the ritual of the *konungstekja* obsolete in the following centuries suggests that if there was a plan, it plainly failed. The ritual of the *konungstekja* never disappeared during the High Middle Ages. More, it remained an indisputable element of the system of royal succession, as every king had to be hailed. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the Norwegian clergy from attempting to get rid of the *konungstekja* as public ritual. Following the ceremony of coronation, a *Law of Royal Succession* was made, which clearly displayed

46 Percy E. Schramm. 1937. *A History of the English Coronation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.; Le Goff 2001, 19–36; Palazzo 2001, 37–90.

47 Palazzo 2001, 42–43.

48 *höfum konung kórónaðan eigi síðr en enskir menn eða Danir* (ME, Ch. 21).

Eystein's ambition to implement a new and enduring foundation for royal succession and to eclipse royal acclamation at the *þing*.

The *Law of Royal Succession* has been considered as the decisive breakthrough for modern kingship in medieval Norway. The law has been largely and thoroughly discussed in Norwegian historiography, and we will here only give a short outline of its main principles, concentrating on the elements that unveil the archbishop's ambitions to control the royal election.⁴⁹

The circumstances surrounding the making of the *Law of Royal Succession* remain unclear. It is assumed that it was written shortly after the coronation ceremony, probably the same summer.⁵⁰ The question of authorship has been debated, but the scholarship regularly points to Archbishop Eystein.

The *Law of Royal Succession* ascribed the Church decisive influence on the choice of a new king. This influence is conspicuous in the principles which brought a candidate to the throne, but also in the modalities for choosing a royal successor.

The *Law of Royal Succession* established a new system of succession that aimed at replacing the traditional system of royal election in Norway based on the election and acclamation at the regional *þing* in two ways. First, the law enounced principles such as primogeniture and legitimate descent, which automatically designated royal successors. These principles were new and potentially disqualified a good number of aspirants whose claims rested only on their royal descent. In bringing in hereditary succession, the law rendered obsolete the ritual of *konungstekja* as an elective institution. At best it could only be an arena for popular confirmation, which it became in the 13th century.

Second, it organized a new system of kingmaking. The *Law of Royal Succession* opened the way for the election of a new aspirant by a collegium on the basis of criteria defined by the Church.⁵¹ The evaluation was performed by

49 Torfinn Tobiassen. 1964. "Tronfølgelov og privilegiebrev. En studie i kongedømmets ideologi under Magnus Erlingsson." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 43, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget: 181–273; Johan Schreiner. 1946. "Lovene om tronfølgeloven 1163–1273." in *Festskrift til Erik Arup*: 88–104; Erik Vandvik. 1962. *Magnus Erlingssons privilegiebrev og kongevigsl*. Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo Nr. 1: Oslo: 625–637; Andreas Holmsen. 1965. "Erkebiskop Eystein og tronfølgeloven av 1163." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 44: 225–254; Jens Arup Seip. 1940–1942. "Problemer og metode i norsk middelalderforskning." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 32: 49–133; Schreiner 1946–1948, 518–534.

50 Tobiassen 1964, 190.

51 Apart from royal descent, the king's qualities and aptitudes also were important in the choice of the new king during the ceremony of the *konungstekja*. Judging from the portraits of rulers in the sagas, a good king was expected to have good military skills, but also

the archbishop and his five bishops, as well as by a collegium of 60 *vistratom monnum* [wise men], that is, 12 men chosen by each bishop. It is now accepted that the composition of the collegium ascribed the Church decisive influence on the choice of the royal successor.⁵² The procedure for the election was not the sole element that guaranteed the Church control over future royal election. The law also determined a locus for election that favored episcopal influence.

But after the fall of the king, then all the bishops and abbots and *hirdstjorene* with the entire hird are summoned to head north to the holy king Olav to take counsel with the archbishop. [...] And everyone shall journey within the first month after the king's fall.⁵³

It was thus established that later elections of new kings would take place where King Olav dwelt, that is, Nidaros. The town was the center for the cult of St Olav, whose relics lay in the cathedral. Through this, the Norwegian kingship was more intimately associated with the saint. But Nidaros was also the metropolis of the church province. In moving the election to Nidaros, the *Law of Royal Succession* located the royal election on the Church's most prestigious ground and within the archbishops' strongest sphere of influence, thereby increasing the Church's symbolic and political weight in the process. Thus the *Law of Royal Succession* aimed to replace the traditional system of public acclamation repeated at the different *þings* by a closed meeting of representatives organized a single time at a single place for the whole realm.

All these dispositions aimed at consolidating church control over the process of future royal succession. Not only was the new king elected on the basis of principles which were defined by the Church and which largely stressed royal subordination, but in fixing the terms for royal election the law established an arena fully controlled by the Church. The very choice of the location for election, the identity of the attendees and the time frame within which the meeting was to take place favored the Church, overshadowing the magnates' involvements and reducing popular participation.

to be generous and a good orator. The *Law of Royal Succession* also introduced an evaluation of the candidate's qualities in the choice of the ruler; the choice of the candidate will fall on the one who is *bæzt fallen til* [best suited to it]. These qualities however obeyed to ethical and religious criteria borrowed from the Church's own norms and values. (Tobiassen 1964, 221–273).

52 Tobiassen 1964, 181–273; Seip 1940–1942, 49–133.

53 *En efter frafall konongs. þa se sialfboðet biscopom ollom. oc abotom. oc hirdstiorom með hird allre at sækia norðr til hins Helga Olafs konongs.* [...] *oc se aller a for innan fyrsta manadar. Siðan er þeir spyria farfall konogsins* (NgL 1, 3).

The new procedure of king-taking also needed a new ritual to publically display the result of the collegium's choice. The *Law of Royal Succession* does not mention the location of the election within Nidaros. In view of the archbishop and clergy's role, we can however guess that the residence of the archbishop, which was in the direct vicinity of the cathedral, was in Eystein's mind as the privileged locus for royal election. Another element suggests the decisive implication of Nidaros Cathedral in royal election: the King's Chair.

It is assumed that a permanent homage tribune in stone was built near the Cathedral of Nidaros which was used during the *konungstekja* and the ceremonies of coronations in the 14th and 15th centuries. This information is found in two documents. The *Flatey book* refers to a high-seat that was built by the cathedral: "King Haraldr had the Church of Mary built north in Nidaros, and the altar stood where the steps by the Christ Church are now."⁵⁴ The Norwegian clergyman, Peder Claussøn Friis (1545–1614) also refers to the tribune in his *Norriges og omliggende Oers Beskrivelse* (c. 1600):

Blant anden skøn Bygning i denne By kand oc regnis den skøne Kongens stoel, some er opmuret paa Domkirckegaarden aff besynderlig skøn huggen Steen, met mange Trapper oc Opgange, paa huilcken Stoel Kongerne sade, naar de lode sig hylde eller krone.⁵⁵

These sources are corroborated by archaeological excavations in 1886 in the churchyard of the cathedral, which revealed foundations of what must have been an imposing stone structure.⁵⁶ Despite these excavations and Friis's account, we do not know the exact location of the monument; probably in the churchyard somewhere close to the choir.⁵⁷

54 *Harallr konungr let giora Mariakikiu norðr j Nidarose og stod þar þa alltarið sem nu eru graðrnar hia kristkirkui* (*Flateyjarbók: En samling af norske konge-sagaer*, ed. By G. Vigfusson and C.R. Unger. Christiania: Mallings 1860–1868, Vol. III: 344).

55 "Among other splendid buildings in this town one can also count the beautiful King's Chair which is built in the Cathedral's yard with astonishing beautiful chisel stones, with many stairs and staircases, on which the kings sat when they let themselves be acclaimed or crowned." *Samlede Skrifter af Peder Claussøn Friis*, Gustav Storm (ed.) Kristiana 1881: 351.

56 O.C.M. Krefting. 1890. *Undersøgelser i Trondhjem*. J.C. Gundersens bogtrykkeri.

57 Andås 2008a, 73–75; Øystein Ekroll. 2006. "Arkeologi og myter: Kva skjedde omkring Nidarosdomen før 1200?" in Pål Thonstad Sandvik (ed.) *Trondhjemske samlinger*, 2006. Trondheim: Trondhjems historiske forening: 9–32.

Of course we know nothing of the staging around the King's Chair, but we can imagine that at some point the chosen king took place on an elevated high-seat and was acclaimed king.

The date of the erection of the King's Chair is unknown, but construction may have begun in the context of the law of 1163. Although scholars have seen this monument as belonging to a late medieval context (14th to early 16th century)⁵⁸ Margrete Andås views the construction of the high-seat as part of the consolidation of archiepiscopal control over rituals of succession in the last half of the civil war.⁵⁹

Considering the survival and even the preeminence acquired by the *Eyraping* in the *konungstekja* at some points in the late 12th century, we can refine Andås's hypothesis and argue that the King's Chair was built during the episcopate of Eystein (1158/59–1188) and may have been as much part of his political program as the crowning ceremony and the *Law of Royal Succession*. In this view, the King's Chair would be the culmination of a process inaugurated by the law of 1163 and eventually realized in the election meeting. With the erection of the monument, the process of royal election would have been fully integrated in the ritualistic space of the archbishop's cathedral, thereby explicitly strengthening ecclesiastic control over royal succession.

Gaining Ground: Relics and *Konungstekja*

Neither the *Law of Royal Succession* nor the introduction of royal coronations reduced the political importance of the ceremony of the *konungstekja*. For long afterwards, the acclamation at the different regional *pings* still made kings, and the law of 1163 was never to be applied. The institution of the *ping* and its role in royal succession probably was so deeply anchored in Norwegian culture that the Church never succeeded in abolishing the *konungstekja*. It merely gained control over it through the introduction of Catholic liturgy into its ceremonial. This concerns first of all the practice of using relics in the ceremony of the *konungstekja*.

The Pre-eminence of the Eyraping

Traditionally, for a king to be legally elected, the ritual of the *konungstekja* needed to be repeated locally at provincial *pings*. However, at some point in the second half of the 12th century, the *ping* of Nidaros, *Eyraping*, achieved pre-eminence over the other assemblies in the realm in the acclamation of

⁵⁸ Ekroll 2006, 23.

⁵⁹ Andås 2008, 82–84.

kings.⁶⁰ This development is difficult to date. The earliest mention of *Eyraping*'s primacy is found in the *Sverris Saga*. True, in his *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson traces the central position of *Eyraping* in the royal acclamation back to Magnus Olafsson in 1035: "Magnus Olavsson advanced to the town (Nidaros), where he was joyfully received. He then summoned the people to *Eyraping*, and when the bondes met at the *ping*, Magnus was taken to be king over the whole land."⁶¹ However, Snorri's account cannot be seen as completely reliable, as the work was written sometime between around 1230, when the *ping* had acquired its leading position. The saga may merely have reflected a conception of his time rather than the reality of the past.

According to the *Sverris saga*, in 1197 King Sverre summoned an assembly in the Viken where he commanded the audience to elect another king (Sigurd). A spokesman answered, assuring Sverre that "Our acquaintance with the law and the rights of men of rank in Norway, made us know where it was legal to choose a king, and we consider no man rightly chosen to rule the land except at the *Eyraping* in Thronðheim."⁶² We do not know whether these words really were those of a man from 1197 and as such reflected a contemporary perception, or whether they were the author's, reflecting the conceptions of the two first decades of the following century. Several decades later, the author of the *Hákonar saga*, Sturla Þórðarson, still considered it to be "mostly the custom that the king should be chosen in Nidaros at *Eyraping*."⁶³ 'The law' to which the speaker in the *Sverris saga* referred probably was the *Law of Royal Succession* of 1163, which assigned Nidaros a central place in the election of the new king.⁶⁴ It is commonly stated that despite the fact that the law was never applied, its principles still made their way into the minds of the people. For instance, the *Law of Royal Succession* sought to establish the principles of primogeniture in royal succession, which to a large extent was successful by the mid-13th century. Moreover, it also attempted to ascribe Nidaros a privileged position in the election of kings by prescribing the organization of a general council in the metropolitan see. Such a council was never organized in connection with a royal election. Although it did not allude to *Eyraping* and the ceremony of the

60 Helle 2003, 370.

61 Magnús Ólafsson fór með liði sínu út til kaupangs; var honum þar vel fagnat. Síðan lét hann stefna Eyraping. En er bóndafólkkit kom til þings, þá var þar Magnús til konungs tekinn yfir land allt (MG, Ch. 3).

62 fva varo os oc login kunnig I Noregi oc ricra manna retr at ver víffum var log. hvar konung atti at taca I Noregi. En ver ætlum engan rett tekinn til landz nema a Eyra-þingi I Noregi I Þrandheimi (SvS, Ch. 138).

63 meftr vandi at kongr uari tekinn j þrandheime aa eyra-þinge (HsH, Ch. 291).

64 NgL I, 3–4.

konungstekja, but rather to a synod-like general assembly headed by the clergy, somehow the idea of a pre-eminence of Nidaros in the election of kings was transferred to the *þing*.

What happened between the promulgation of the law in 1163 and the apparent common conception 35 years later that the *Eyraving* was the central locus for royal acclamation is difficult to assess. One element may fill the gap and help to throw light both on the promotion of *Eyraving* and on the legacy of the *Law of Royal Succession*. The *Eyraving's* leading position in the election of Norwegian kings was paralleled with another trend, which in my view clearly backs this primacy: the introduction of Christian liturgy in general and of relics of saints in particular into the ritual of the *konungstekja*.

St Olav and St Sunniva

In Norway the presence of the relics of St Sunniva and in particular of St Olav during the ritual of the *konungstekja* is attested from the early 13th century.

The cult of St Olav developed in Nidaros shortly after the king's death in 1030 and intensified after the establishing of the church province in the mid-12th century.⁶⁵ Under the aegis of Archbishop Eystein in particular, the cult was increasingly associated with the Norwegian crown. As far as we know, King Magnus Erlingsson was hailed at the *þing* of Bergen without the presence of relics. When Sverre was hailed king in Nidaros in 1177, the presence of the relics of St Olav is not mentioned in his saga either. Our documentary sources however show the growing presence of the reliquary of St Olav at the ritual of the *konungstekja* at *Eyraving*. The *Hákonar saga* reports four instances when the relics of the saint were brought forth for the acclamation of the new king: 1204, 1217, 1239 and 1240.⁶⁶

Despite its preeminence, the *Eyraving* was not the sole location for the ritual of the *konungstekja*. It was also performed in Bergen at *Gulaving*, this time in the presence of the relics of St Sunniva. We know very little about these relics. According to the sagas, they were translated from the abbey of Selje to Christ Church in Bergen in September 1170.⁶⁷ The sources refer to the presence

65 Sverre Bagge. 2003a. "Den heroisk tid-kirkereform og kirkekamp 1153–1214." in Imsen 2003: 51–79; Ekroll 2012, 45–66.

66 *HsH*, Ch. 2, 17, 199 and 223.

67 Knut Helle. 1982. *Bergen Bys Historie. Kongssete og kjøpstad: fra opphavet til 1536*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget: 92.

of St Sunniva's relics on two occasions, in 1218 for the acclamation of King Håkon Håkonsson at *Gulaping* and in 1273 when Eirik received the title of king and his brother, Håkon, became duke.⁶⁸

Relics of saints were not the only relics used during the ritual of the *konungstekja*. The presence of the cross which housed a splinter of the Holy Cross illustrates how other liturgical elements increasingly pervaded the ritual. Thus in 1240, when Håkon the Young, son of King Håkon Håkonsson, was given the title of king at *Eyraving*, the shrine of the saint was moved out from the Cathedral together with the cross containing the *Lignum Domini*.⁶⁹ In 1257 when Magnus was hailed king, no relics of saints were available and a simple cross was used.⁷⁰ Finally, the *Hirðskrá* (1274) refers to the presence of a broad variety of relics: "a holy cross and other relics" shall be carried in a procession to the place of the *ping*.⁷¹

Relics and the Sacralization of Space

Relics of saints played a decisive role in the development of both the Christian faith and the Church. Relics were objects of popular devotion and due to the celebrity of the saints, but also their specific magical qualities, they could attract pilgrims who visited the shrine to gain their indulgence or as a penance.⁷² Possession of relics of a renowned saint was a source of prestige and power, and princes, lords, monasteries and churches all competed to acquire relics and use them to legitimize and exalt their authority.⁷³ Clerical control over relics is symptomatic of their role as instrument of Church power and in particular as a device to control ritual space. Indeed, since the early Middle Ages, relics had played a decisive role in the expansion of Christianity and in the consolidation of Rome's authority in Western Europe. Indeed, the expansion of Christianity in the Early Middle Ages was intimately connected to the

68 *HsH*, Ch. 23; *MLs*, 163.

69 *HsH*, Ch. 223.

70 *HsH*, Ch. 292.

71 *hælgá kross oc aðra hælgá ðomæ* (*Hsk*, Ch. 5).

72 Charles Freeman. 2011. *Holy Bones, Holy Dust. How relics shaped the history of medieval Europe*. Yale University Press: 94–107.

73 E. Bozóky. 2007. *La politique des reliques de Constantin à saint Louis. Protection collective et légitimation du pouvoir*. Paris: Beauchesne: 6; E. Bozóky. 1996. "Voyages de reliques et démonstration du pouvoir aux temps féodaux." *Actes des congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur public* Vol. 26, Numéro 26: 267–280; Nicholas Vincent. 2001. *The Holy Blood. King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic*. Cambridge University Press.

translation of relics from the religion's 'centers' (Jerusalem, Rome) to every corner of Western Europe.⁷⁴

The sacralization of space extended beyond the location of churches by way of reliquaries. Relics were usually placed on the high altar of the church. They were disposed in reliquaries, which served to keep relics safe both from degradation and from view. Beyond their conservation and protective function however, shrines served to transport relics outside the walls of the church. The translation of relics in reliquaries was organized in processions and could be initiated for varying purposes, to welcome dignitaries or for certain festivities such as the feast of the saint. The procession was headed by the local clergy and followed a defined circuit meant to delineate a sacred space.⁷⁵

The existence of a reliquary of St Olav is first attested during the reign of King Magnus Olafsson (1035–1047).⁷⁶ Øystein Ekroll has expressed strong skepticism and suggests that the reliquary was made later, presumably during the reign of King Magnus Erlingsson and at the instigation of Archbishop Eystein.⁷⁷ An important literature about the saint was developed in his time as archbishop and to which he decisively contributed as author or patron.⁷⁸ Similarly, the making of a new shrine would naturally fit his architectural project of extending the Cathedral. Indeed, the construction of the octagon, which he probably started in the 1180s, was meant to house the relics of the saint and to allow pilgrims to walk around the shrine.⁷⁹ The shrine was taken out of the Cathedral in many occasions and in particular for the celebrations of the saint in summer (28 July–5 August) and on Palm Sunday.⁸⁰

Konungstekja and the Translation of Relics

The translation of the relics to the site of the *þing* of the *konungstekja* (*adventus*) was an important issue in the power struggle between the Church and the monarchy in the early 13th century. The presence of relics was perceived as necessary by royal candidates who wished to sanction their election with

74 Dominique Iogna-Prat. 2006. *La Maison Dieu*, Paris: Seuil: 168–176.

75 E. Bozóky E. (dir.) 1999. "Les reliques. Objets, cultes, symboles." *Actes du colloque international de l'Université du Littoral-Côte d'Opale, 4–6 septembre 1997*. Brepols; Patrick Broussel. 1971. *Des reliques et de leur bon usage*. Paris: Balland.

76 *Olafs Saga hins helga*. Flateyrbok 11: 378.

77 Øystein Ekroll. 2003. "St. Olavs skrin i Nidaros." in Imsen 2003: 326–329.

78 Mortensen & Mundal 2003, 353–385.

79 Ekroll 2003, 338–340.

80 Ekroll 2003, 325; David Chadd. 2007. "The Ritual of Palm Sunday: Reading Nidaros." In Margrete S. Andås et al. (eds.) *The Medieval Cathedral of Trondheim. Architecture and Ritual Constructions in Their European Context*. Brepols: 266–267.

divine legitimacy. Yet the authorization to translate the relics rested in the hands of the religious community: the canons and the archbishop for the relics of St Olav and the bishop of Bergen for the relics of Sunniva. In the following we will show that this authority over the translation of relics gave the clergy a powerful influence on the ritual of the *konungstekja*.

In 1217 King Inge Bårdsson died in Bergen. According to the *Hákonar saga*, when the news came to Nidaros, members of the Birkebeiner faction went to Håkon, a descendant of King Håkon Sverresson, with the intention to acclaim him king at the *þing*. Voices rose however and questioned his legitimacy, and a trial by ordeal was organized in order to prove Håkon's royal kinship. As we will see later in greater detail, the ritual could not be performed (see 1, 2). The Birkebeiners lost patience and went to the cathedral to request the shrine of St Olav be borne out to the *þing*. Archbishop Guttorm was away that day, and the local clerks refused to let the shrine be carried out, threatening anyone who would try to remove the relics with excommunication.⁸¹ The outcome is not surprising. In the eyes of the archbishop and of the Church, Håkon's claims clearly contradicted their principles of royal succession, which favored legitimate birth. Håkon did not conform to the principle and thereby had no rights to the royal title. The archbishop rather supported the candidacy of Earl Skule, who was of legitimate royal descent. *Konungstekja* was performed anyway and Håkon became king and took a share of the realm together with Earl Skule.

The arrival of the newly elected king in Bergen the following week in order to be acclaimed at *Gulaping* illustrates how in the early 13th-century relics were intimately connected to king making. Echoes of the episodes in Nidaros had preceded Håkon's arrival. Letters from the canons of Nidaros urged their fellow clerics of Bergen not to show honor to King Håkon.⁸² The Bergen clergy however welcomed him ostentatiously and brought the reliquary with the relics of St Sunniva and 'other holy things' out of Christ Church to the *þing*. The episode of Nidaros was clearly referred to in a speech during the *þing* stressing the fact that the absence of the relics was the responsibility of the canons alone.⁸³ Earl Skule had played a pivotal role in these events, however. As candidate to the throne, he was a leading figure among those who questioned

81 *var þa Blaasid epter fornre sidveniu uot aa Eyrar ollu folk og voru men sender til korsbrædra ad uot skilldi bera skjijn hinns heilaga Olafs kongs. þa er menn komu til kirkiunnar var hun j laasi. enn kluckarar sogdu so. ad kors-brædr legdi hueriumm bann vid er vp bryti kirkiuna og uot bære skjijned* (HsH, Ch. 17).

82 HsH, Ch. 18.

83 *margir aðrir helgir* (HsH, Ch. 23).

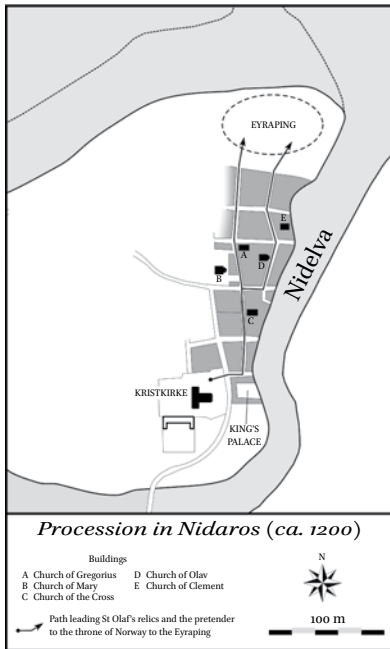


FIGURE 1
Possible itinerary of processions to the site of the Eyraping

Håkon's birthright.⁸⁴ We do not know whether he stood behind the refusal of the canons to deliver the shrine of St Olav. The saga of Håkon implicitly suggests that he held regular secret meetings with the canons and had a finger in their maneuver.⁸⁵

Skule's apparent lack of control over the relics however was soon to cost him. In 1239, Duke Skule openly rebelled against King Håkon.⁸⁶ During a stay in Nidaros in the winter, Skule summoned *Eyraping* in order to be acclaimed king. He went to the Cathedral to have the relics of St Olav delivered to him. As the canons refused to let him carry the shrine from the choir, the duke's men took it by force to the *ping*. Together with the relics, they took not only the "the cross in which was *lignum Domini*," but also the axe and spear of the Saint King Olav, which shows that they wished to benefit from all the legitimacy the saint could provide.⁸⁷ The reliquary and the other relics were carried out in a procession to the king's house where they met Duke Skule and his *hirð*. Then the cortege marched through the town to the site of the *ping*.

84 *HsH*, Ch. 13.

85 *HsH*, Ch. 14.

86 *HsH*, Ch. 198.

87 *kroffsa er i uar lignum domini ok aux ok fpiot inf Helga Olafs (Ibid.)*

During the ritual of the *konungstekja*, great emphasis was laid on St Olav; the duke's direct kinship with the saint was proclaimed and Skule swore his oath on its shrine.⁸⁸ Once the ritual was performed, Duke Skule returned the shrine to the Cathedral. The saga then suggests for the first and only time that a procession led by the Canons was to take the shrine back to the altar. However the local clergy again manifested its opposition to the acclamation of Skule in refusing to organize such a procession as well as to ringing the bells of the church. Instead, the shrine was discreetly received in the back yard of the Cathedral.⁸⁹

We see that bringing the shrine of St Olav out of the Cathedral was a difficult task for a royal candidate. As part of their 'property' and prerogatives, the archbishops of Nidaros exerted firm control over the use of St Olav's relics during the *konungstekja* in order to further their political aims. Accepting or refusing the translation of relics was a robust political statement. As illustrated above, the presence or absence of the relics gave the archbishop great political weight in the choice of a new king.

The clergy's influence on the ritual of the *konungstekja* was not limited to authorizing the use of the relics or not. The preceding examples show that in the 13th century, the translation of the shrines itself to the site of the assemblies had become a major element in the ritual of the *konungstekja*.⁹⁰ The shrines were carried to the location of the *þing* in solemn processions led by the local clergy and in Nidaros most probably by the archbishop himself. The episode with Skule is particularly instructive and reveals many details of the ceremonial.

Now these holy things were borne out and down the street to the king's house; then the duke came to meet it with his entire bodyguard armed to the teeth; and so they marched to the *Eyrarþing*.⁹¹

The description shows that the procession followed a defined route through the town. Although in the case of Duke Skule the clergy was part of the procession, we can assume that under usual circumstances the procession that accompanied the relics was first led by the clerics. As mentioned above, the

88 *HsH*, Ch. 199.

89 *Ibid.*

90 Ekroll 2003, 325.

91 *Ok er þessir helgir domar voru bornir ofan í konungf-garð þá kom þar hertugi amot uíð alla hīrðina ok foru fua vtt a æyra-þing.* (*HsH*, Ch. 199).

cortege went to the king's residence which was located on the river, a hundred meters east of Christ Church. The royal candidate then met the clerics by his residence before they departed together for the assembly, which was in the north of town by the fjord (see Figure 1). The 'circuit' was not long. It followed the main streets of Nidaros and probably made stops at each church and presumably those which had housed the relics of saints in the past (St Clement's and St Olav's Church). It was a public ceremonial which was meant to include the entire population of the town. We have no detailed account of the processions in Nidaros for the specific purpose of the king's acclamation or indeed for any other occasions such as the celebrations of St Olav each summer. But it can be assumed that the population participated by showing its support to the candidate with shouts and yells. The presence of the reliquary in the cortege must have generated gestures and attitudes of devotion and prayer as well. The role of the local clergy and of the saintly relics did not stop at the gate of the *ping*. They both were present at the assembly and even played an active role in the staging of the acclamation of the king. Indeed, the very absence of the clergy during the *konungstekja* could be interpreted as a manifestation of the clergy's opposition to supporting the claims of the candidate. The fact that Skule had to deliver the shrine of St Olav back to the cathedral demonstrates that the clergy did not participate in the ceremony and opposed his acclamation.

The very presence of relics in itself during the ritual of the *konungstekja* conferred upon the clerics a privileged role in the process of election of kings. The transport of relics went beyond the simple act of translation. Through saintly relics the Church took control of space and ascribed the bishops authority over the ritual. One example of this is the *konungstekja* at *Eyraving* in the summer of 1204 which followed King Guttorm's death. According to *Böglunga sögur*, several candidates competed for the royal title: Earl Håkon, Inge Bårdsson and Sigurd 'Kongsfrende.' Earl Håkon's name was recurrently proposed, but Archbishop Eirik strongly opposed his acclamation. A group of magnates was then put in charge of choosing one of them, but they could not reach an agreement. Archbishop Eirik then took the lead and summoned the Assembly. He brought the reliquary of St Olav out of Nidaros Cathedral in a procession to *Eyraving*.⁹² The saga recounts that the archbishop made a speech about the choice of the king and finished in declaring that farmers should choose the new king.⁹³ After long-lasting deliberations, to the great satisfaction of the archbishop the

92 *Bs*, 28.

93 *Ibid*.

farmers chose Inge Bårdsson. The election thus went Eirik's way. Although we do not know whether he interfered in the election and the extent of his action if he did, some elements in the text suggest that the archbishop did affect certain premises for the election. Archbishop Eirik was the first and only one to talk and. We do not know exactly what he said, but it becomes clear that he placed the choice of the new king in the hands of the farmers. Eirik had made a clever choice. The farmers chose Inge Bårdsson on the basis that they wanted "to have one [king] who is the closest to the royal kin, and who from his father side is from the best kin in Trøndelag."⁹⁴ Inge belonged to the kin of Reinsætten who were one of the most powerful families in Trøndelag, the region of Nidaros. The farmers expressed thus a strong concern for a man of local kinship. The archbishop most certainly was aware of this and in leaving the choice to the local population there was little doubt as to the outcome.

The episode is not described in great detail, and it is difficult to draw conclusions from it. However, it appears to me that behind Eirik's successful influencing of the election was his privileged situation at the *þing*, which resulted from the *adventus*. It is true that as Archbishop of Nidaros, his "voice" certainly weighed heavily. However, in leading the procession that carried the relics of St Olav to the *þing*, he was allowed to inaugurate the ritual and use his speech to define the very premises for the selection, with the consequences we know.

The place and role of the shrines were also central in the rite of oath-taking. The saga of Håkon systematically mentions this, sometimes at the expense of the rite of oratories which occurred at the beginning and which played a decisive role in the defense of the candidates' rights. Once the candidate was proclaimed king, oaths were sworn on a reliquary by the king and by the different social estates. The relics of the saints guaranteed respect for the commitments, which now involved God himself and threatened perjury with divine sanction.⁹⁵ The ritual of the oath was important because it was the final stage of the process of king making. As soon as the oaths ended, the candidate was king.

We see that the *konungstekja* of Nidaros was pervaded with Olavian ideology. The account of the *konungstekja* of Duke Skule can also provide insight into the place of the cult of St Olav in the ideology of kingship. The saga tells us that a speaker declaimed Skule's pedigree back to King Olav. Although we have no second example of this, it can be assumed that in the 13th century it was common practice to legitimize a candidate's royal claims by laying emphasis

94 *Hafue den som er lige nær kommen aff Kongeslecten ved hannem, oc er paa Fæderne aff den beste Slect i ald Trondelagen raad (Ibid.)*

95 Raymond Verdier (ed.) 1991. *Le serment. I. Signes et fonctions*. Paris: CNRS.

on their kinship with the saint. Remarkably, in the days preceding Skule's acclamation, the saga recounts that the Canons "read books to him" which proved his rights to the throne.⁹⁶ A consistent literature on royal genealogies existed from the end of the 12th century and the early 13th century, which ascribed a central position to St Olav: the Norwegian synoptic and the *Konungatal*. These were works connected to Nidaros.

Between 1161 and Magnus Erlingsson's acclamation with the "consent" of Archbishop Eystein and 1240, when Håkon the Young swore his oath on the shrine of St Olav in the presence of the archbishop, the ritual of the *konungstekja* had experienced decisive transformations. At some point during the period of the civil war, the ritual was Christianized through the introduction of liturgy, and was used to make not only kings, but Christian ones. The introduction of Christian liturgy encompassed every stage in the ritual of the *konungstekja*, transforming streets and *þings* into ecclesiastical spaces and assigning the clergy a decisive influence on the political process.

Jernbyrd: Trial by Ordeal

Besides the *konungstekja* and royal coronation, another ritual existed which was repeatedly used to determine the legitimacy of royal claimants in the context of the Norwegian civil war: trial by ordeal. We will see now how the Norwegian clergy actively used the ritual to influence royal succession.

Ordeals in general were judicial procedures, meant to radically and definitively settle disputes and disagreements.⁹⁷ The test was sacred; it was a *judicium Dei*, a judgment of God. The procedure was based on the premise that God would help the innocent by performing the miraculous healing.⁹⁸ The ritual consisted in subjecting the accused to some ruthless type of test, such as being cast into a pool of water, retrieving a stone from a kettle of boiling water, walking over red-hot ploughshares or carrying red-hot iron with bare hands (*ferrum candens*). The accused was considered innocent if the body parts involved remained unscathed or if the injuries healed in an unusually short period of time. Ordeals drew their social and political significance from the fact they were public rituals. The test in itself was performed in front of an audience, partly to assure that no trickery was involved. In particular, injuries were assessed through public display. Ordeals were "a *spectaculum*" and a

96 *HsH*, Ch. 198.

97 «Gudsdom», by Stig Iuul and Lars Hamre. *KLNM* V. 546–553. See also Robert Bartlett. 1986. *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal*. New York: Clarendon Press: 43–44.

98 Bartlett 1986.

“demonstrative ceremony,” made up of dramatic gestures and solemn display, meant to make a strong and lasting impression on the audience.⁹⁹ However, the public character of ordeals made them more than judicial procedures: they also became the scene for political communication.

As Bartlett has argued, trials by ordeal intimately involved power institutions. They were not devices for individuals to solve their judicial problems, but rather instruments of power for official authorities like the Church and the crown.¹⁰⁰ Although the whole test appealed to the supernatural, it placed great influence on the final verdict in the hands of those who presided over the execution of the ordeal. In Norway, like in Western Europe, because the trial required divine intercession, it necessarily involved the clergy, the only ones competent to perform the ritual.¹⁰¹ The test’s instruments had to be consecrated by a priest and kept in the church before the trial. The actors involved in the trial had to be prepared beforehand through a period of fasting before the day of the trial. The ritual often was carried out in a church at a solemn moment during the Mass. It was also during the Mass that the defendant’s hands or feet had to be unwrapped. Finally, it was a priest who pronounced the final verdict, the judgment of God.

In Norway trials by ordeal were most probably introduced by the Church at the end of the Viking Age and were used in legal procedures.¹⁰² They were prescribed in Norwegian law books in particular in cases of sexual misconduct. The *Frostaping* law prescribed the ordeal for bestiality, whereas the *Gulaping* law envisaged the ordeal as punishment for sodomy and sexual relations with close kin.¹⁰³ The *Olafs saga helga* also accounts several episodes of ordeals generally for the settling of crimes.¹⁰⁴ As in several other countries, trials by ordeal were frequently used in questions of paternity as well.¹⁰⁵ In Norway however,

99 Peter Brown. 1975. “Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change.” *Daedalus*, Vol. 104, No. 2, Spring: 138.

100 Bartlett 1986, 41. William Ian Miller. 1988. “Ordeal in Iceland.” *Scandinavian Studies* 60: 189–191.

101 In England, churches could hold a franchise to conduct ordeals. Margaret H. Kerr, et al. 1992. “Cold Water and Hot Iron: Trial by Ordeal in England.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Vol. 22, No. 4: 582.

102 “Gudsdóm i Norge.” by Lars Hamre. *KLNM* Vol. v, 552 ff.

103 *Frostaping* 111, 18; *Gulaping* 24 and 158.

104 *Olafs saga helga*, Ch. 135.

105 Miller 1988, 189–218.; For Spain see, José Martinéz Gijón. 1961. “La prueba en el derecho territorial de Navarra y Aragón durante la Baja Edad Media.” *Anuario de historia del derecho español*, Vol. 31: 43–44.

this particularity made ordeals a decisive element in the processes of royal designation during the civil war in Norway: In practice the rules for royal succession were not clearly established, which made the proof of royal descent a crucial issue.¹⁰⁶ Between 1180 and the Pope's ban (1247), trials by ordeal were used in the struggle for royal succession and ascribed great political influence to the Church.¹⁰⁷

Norwegian Ordeals and Royal Succession

Sverris saga, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, and the *Böglunga sögur* relate four accounts of ordeals used to assert royal legitimacy. In each case, the trial in question was the ordeal of hot iron (ON, *jernbyrð*), which consisted of the protagonist carrying red-hot iron nine paces. Prior to this, the first reference to an ordeal in connection with a king's election is reported in the *Heimskringla* and tells of the trial of Harald Gille in the 1120s. He claimed to be the legitimate son of the late king Magnus Bareleg and at the request of the ruling king, Sigurd, he accepted to undergo the ordeal of iron to prove his legitimacy.

Nine glowing plowshares were laid down, and Harald went over them with bare feet, attended by two bishops. Three days after the iron trial the ordeal was taken to proof, and the feet were found unburnt.¹⁰⁸

According to the saga, the ordeal was one of the greatest events in Norwegian history. The role of the Church in the execution of the trial is clear, with the bishops in attendance. Its implication in the decision is less obvious and Snorri tells us that the kings' councilors disagreed and that the king decided on his own to subject the claimant to the ritual.

Eirík 1181

The first ordeal to take place in the context of the civil war occurred in spring 1181, when a man named Eirík came to King Sverre in Nidaros. Eirík claimed to be the son of King Sigurd Haraldsson and voluntarily offered to undergo the

106 In 12th and 13th century England, ordeals were only used in criminal cases. Robert Bartlett. 2011. *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075–1225*. Clarendon Press: 179–184.

107 Sverre Bagge. 2011. "The Ordeal in Norwegian Law and Practice." in Per Andersen, Pia Letto-Vanamo, Kjell Åke Modéer & Helle Vogt (ed.) *Liber Amicorum Ditlev Tamm. Law, History and Culture*. DJØF Publishing: 55–69.

108 *at 9 plógjárn glóandi váru niðr lögð, ok gékk Haraldr þar eptir berum fótum, ok leiddu hann byskupar tveir. Ok þrimr dögum síðar var skírslan reynd; váru þá fætr hans úbrunnir.* (sc, Ch. 34).

ordeal of hot iron to publically prove his kinship. Major political implications were at stake. If the kinship was proven, by way of consequence Eirik would become Sverre's brother and could claim the royal title and a share in the kingship. The proposition was discussed by the king and his counselors and finally accepted. The king however made clear that the result of the trial would not affect the political situation and that he would not "grant [him] the name of King, or give up the realm [he] now possess."¹⁰⁹ The account of the incident by the author of the *Sverris saga* credited King Sverre with the instigation of the oath: "For this cause you lay your hands on the Holy Relics and the Book, and make this appeal to God: that He will allow your hand to come unharmed from the iron if you are King Sigurd's son and my brother."¹¹⁰ The purpose of the trial now was limited to proving Eirik and Sverre's kinship and no longer his claims to the crown. Eirik then fasted and placed his hands over relics and the Bible, and swore that he was the son of the king. The relics must have been those of St Olav, as the saint was usually associated with the ritual of *konungstekja* in Nidaros. Eirik emerged victorious from the ordeal. As agreed, he did not claim his part of the kingship, but entered Sverre's retinue as captain.

King Sverre here clearly biased the test in formulating the oath so as to secure a favorable result whatever the outcome. However, Sverre had not demanded the test and his maneuver had only been defensive. We do not know with certainty what role the Church played in the affair. And as we will frequently see, it is a recurrent trait of *Sverris saga* to silence the role of clerics in rituals and ceremonies. Sverre and Archbishop Eystein were in open conflict as Eystein was loyal to King Magnus. At the time of the trial however, the archbishop was in exile in England. He thus could not have been directly involved in the situation, but the canons of the Cathedral, who were still officiating in Nidaros, most probably were. There is reason to think that, like their superior, they were Sverre's enemies. Manifestly they did not oppose the execution of the test. Moreover, they willingly allowed the shrine of St Olav to be used in the ritual. The result of the ordeal did not directly address Sverre's legitimacy to the throne. But if the king had not 'neutralized' Eirik's claims, his power would have been significantly diminished by sharing the crown with another king. Any hindrance or obstacle to Sverre's power was in the Church's interest.

Eirik's ordeal was followed by a group of three trials over a bit more than a decade: 1204–1217. The period was marked by great political unrest. After the death of King Sverre (1202) and his son and heir, King Håkon Sverresson (1204),

109 *gefa konungf-nafnit eða þetta ríki er ec hefi nu.* (SvS, Ch. 59).

110 *At þes legr þu hendr þínar á helga doma oc boc. oc því fcytr þu til guðf. oc sva lati hann hond þína heila coma undan iarninu sem þu ert son Sigurþar konungf oc broðir mín.* (Ibid.)

the kingdom of Norway was once more embroiled in a merciless war between of the Birkebeiners and the Baglers. Moreover, each party was also subject to inner tensions and conflicts between candidates to the throne.

Erling Steinvegg 1204

Later examples show more explicitly how the Church used its role as intermediary to influence the result of the ordeal. The second account concerns Erling Magnusson Steinvegg, a supposed son of King Magnus Erlingsson, who was the candidate of the Bagler party. According to the *Böglunga sögur*, after the death of King Håkon Sverreson in January 1204, Erling proposed to Nicholas Bishop of Oslo that he, Erling, should succeed the king by submitting to the iron test to prove his kinship with Magnus Erlingsson.¹¹¹ Nicholas was reluctant, as he personally sought to support the candidacy of Philip Simonsson, a descendant of King Inge Haraldsson (1136–1161). However Erling was popular among the Baglers and many chieftains supported his cause. Nicholas finally accepted, but decided that the ordeal should be performed in Borg. The purpose of this was to move Erling away from Oslo where his supporters were. Erling went to Borg and prepared for the test.¹¹² As it will become clear, Nicholas was able to decide over the success of the ordeal. But he may have been afraid that the result of the test would not be enough to stop Erling from taking over the leadership of the Baglers. He then had the idea to oblige Erling to undergo the test in Tønsberg in presence of Valdemar, King of Denmark.¹¹³ The reason for this will become clear later in the chapter. Indeed, as Nicholas proposed his help to make the test successful, he warned Erling that he knew “for sure that the King of Denmark will kill you if the ordeal would fail.”¹¹⁴ Nicholas thus counted on the King of Denmark to definitively remove Erling from the line of succession to King Håkon. The bishop went then to Valdemar to turn him against Erling and to persuade the Danish king to choose Philip instead.

Nicholas however had not realized the extent of Erling’s popularity among the Baglers. When he arrived in Tønsberg and suggested Philip as their leader, the Baglers refused and demanded to be ruled by a son of Magnus. The bishop had now no other choice than to play the card of Erling and proposed a bargain to him – which is highly revealing of the clergy’s conception of the ordeal.

¹¹¹ Bs, Ch. 8.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *At ðer fom ðeticke vil inckis ðig at bære Jærn ða laðer Dane konning ðig ðræbe* (Bs, Ch. 9).

Although I know who your father can have been, I can still turn it (the ordeal) the way I want. If you wish to increase the honour and dignity of Philippus, my kinsman, and make him your earl, then I will join you and help you to raise this party, and support you with all my power, my kinsmen and friends.¹¹⁵

Nicholas thus proposed to Erling to influence the test in return for Erling's promise to choose Philip as earl. Once the two parties agreed, Nicholas used all his ingenuity to give the test a favorable ending. On the day of the trial, Erling feasted, Bishop Nicholas blessed the iron and Valdemar presided over the ritual. In the church of Tønsberg, surrounded by Danish soldiers, Nicholas took the lead in the ritual of exposition of hands. Erling was placed in the door of the choir. His hand was unwrapped and raised up. Then the bishop surreptitiously put his own hands inside Erling's, thereby hiding the injured palm, and declared loudly that he had never seen a hand as uninjured by hot iron as this one.¹¹⁶ The King of Denmark was witness to the 'miracle' and had to give in. Erling was then hailed king at *Haugaping* and Philip became his earl. The test had thus successfully proven Erling's royal descent. Nonetheless, more than anything the episode showed the political dexterity of the bishop, whose ambitions clearly went far beyond his role as organizer and executioner of the test. The public assessment of the injuries was the pivotal stage in the recognition of Erling's rights, but in particular it was a decisive means for Nicholas to further his political ends in a broader game of power between the Baglers, Erling, Philip and the King of the Danes. Finally, it is striking that the saga's author of the saga made no secret of how manipulated trial by ordeal was in the hand of the clergy.

Margaret 1204

The ordeal of Margaret in 1204 is unique in comparison to the other cases discussed in this chapter. Firstly, it was not the trial of a candidate to the throne seeking to prove his royal birth. Furthermore, whereas other ordeals resulted in the claimants seeing their rights confirmed, the trial of Margaret was a failure which ended in disgrace. In Christmas 1204, King Håkon Sverresson suddenly died after a meal. Soon his body became blue and showed clear signs of

115 *ennððog jeg velkanð tencke hvem ðin Faðer monne været faa kanð jeg ðog vende ðet hvorleðis jeg vil ðer som ðu vilt forøge min Frenðis Philippi ære oc værdigheð oc giøre hannem til ðin Jarl ða vil jeg fla mig til ðig oc hielpe ðig at reise denne Flok oc ftaa ðig bi aff alð min mact með alle mine Frenðer oc Venner oc hves jeg formaar* (Bs, Ch. 9).

116 *Ibid.*

poisoning. All eyes turned quickly to Queen Margaret, King Sverre's widow, who was compelled to undergo an ordeal by fire to prove her innocence. A man from her circle was chosen to perform it on her behalf. But when his hands were unwrapped, everyone saw how heavily burnt they were. He was taken and drowned. The queen had to go into exile to save her life. Earl Håkon Galinn protected her until she had made her way to Sweden.¹¹⁷

Traditional interpretations have readily associated the ordeal with the supposed murder of King Håkon Sverresson.¹¹⁸ Queen Margaret was sentenced to the ordeal because she was strongly suspected to have poisoned her stepson. This view is that of the author of the saga:

All men had strong suspicions against her and her men for the king's death [...] Håkon Galinn spoke for her, and strongly supported her case. But the chieftains and the king's best friends conducted the case so hard that the queen had to find a man to carry the iron for her and for all her men, to exculpate and...in this case.¹¹⁹

However, we can suspect that behind the criminal case hid a political game for the succession of the dead king. Whether Queen Margaret killed the king or she was totally innocent of the crime, the death of Håkon was an opportunity which some political forces wished to exploit. The case is complex because the author's account seems to be tainted with political partisanship, which has led him to mask the real motives behind the ordeal of Margaret.¹²⁰ This obliges us to place the trial in the broader political context of the competition for the throne of the Birkebeiner kings. Although the author of the saga does his best to provide a motivation for the murder, in the light of the events that followed, he cannot conceal the involvement of Archbishop

¹¹⁷ Bs, Ch. 10.

¹¹⁸ A.O. Johnsen. 1949–1951. «Om Hallvardslegenden og ordalieforbudet.» *Historisk tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 35: 137.

¹¹⁹ *Allir menn mikinn grun á henni ok mönnum hennar um dauða konungs [...] Håkon galinn mælti hana undan, ok var henni mikill stoðamaðr í því máli; en höfðingjar ok hinir beztu vinir konungs fylgðu svá fast þessu máli, at drotnúng varð mann at fá, þann er bæri járn fyrir hana ok alla menn hennar til afburðar ok undanfærslu um þetta mál.* (Bs, Ch. 10).

¹²⁰ The shorter version (A) more particularly tells about the activities of the Baglers (1204–1208), but according to scholars, does not show a marked partiality for this party. The second and longer version however (B) (1202–1217) clearly expresses views favorable to the Birkebeiner. The author of this version is believed to have been a clerk from Nidaros who readily took part for its archbishops. See Knut Helle. 1958. *Omkring Bøglungasögur*. Bergen: Universitet i Bergen: 72–80, 93–111.

Eirik in the succession to Håkon and in particular how beneficial this was for Margaret's condemnation.

As Monclair noted, before the event the author of the saga had conscientiously worked towards depicting a conflicting relationship between the queen and Håkon, which it is said arose from the king's decision to take her daughter, Christine, away from her.¹²¹ We will never know whether the author camouflaged the political game that was developing under through simple naivety or by purposeful complicity. Still, it appears clear that the ordeal was simply a maneuver directed by the archbishop to weaken his most dangerous enemy in the issue of Håkon's succession: Earl Håkon Galinn. Queen Margaret and the earl were good friends and allies.

We have no evidence of the archbishop's direct involvement neither in the decision to submit Margaret to the ordeal by fire nor the influence of the clergy on the staging or result. The saga only mentions "chieftains and the king's best friends." However, we should bear in mind the words of our author, who a few chapters earlier recounted how Bishop Nicholas declared he could easily influence the outcome of ordeals. But while our source is silent on the role of the archbishop in the ritual of ordeal, it tells us much more about his influence on the choice of Håkon's successors. In the wake of Håkon's death in Christmas 1204, Bishop Martin and the *hirð* chose the four-year-old boy Guttorm Sigurdsson as king. While Earl Håkon was named regent, he was still kept away from the royal throne.¹²² Again the implication of the archbishop is far from being obvious. This was to change with the death of the infant king Guttorm at Nidaros in summer of the same year. Archbishop Eirik was compelled to take action visibly. Two candidates battled for the succession to King Guttorm: Earl Håkon Galinn, and Inge Bårdsson. For the first time in his narrative, the author of the saga refers to the enmity between Earl Håkon and the archbishop. For while the *hirð*'s decision in the election of Guttorm had been respectfully accepted, this time Eirik strongly opposed their choice. The assembly of the chieftains agreed to give the title to Earl Håkon, but Archbishop Eirik opposed.¹²³ *Eyrapping* was then summoned and having led the reliquary of St Olav to the place of the election, the archbishop held a speech where he declared that the popular assembly would decide. The scheme was clever, as the archbishop obviously knew on whom their choice would fall: the 'local'

121 Hanne Monclair. 1995. *Forestillinger om kongen i norsk middelalder gjennom ritualene og symbolene rundt ham*. Kults skriftserie nr. 44, Oslo: 495–496.

122 Bs, Ch. 7.

123 Bs, Ch. 12.

Inge Bårdsson, who belonged to an ancient and powerful family from the region of Nidaros, and who also happened to be Eirik's favorite.

All these considerations have led us far from the ordeal of Margaret. Yet, they have increased our insight in the stakes of Håkon's succession. Archbishop Eirik wanted to keep Earl Håkon away from the kingship at any price. The death of Håkon and the decision to submit Margaret, the ally of Earl Håkon, to the ordeal by fire was exploited to undermine the Earl's claims to the throne. The failure of the ordeal put the Earl in a dilemma: taking the throne that was waiting for him or keeping his loyalty to the old queen.

Håkon Håkonsson 1217

The final instance shows striking similarities with the previous episode and concerns the succession of King Inge who died in 1217. King Ingi had a son aged 11, Guttorm, but the *hirð* of the king, which was mainly composed of Birkebeiners, requested the 12-year-old Håkon the Old to be hailed king as heir of King Håkon Sverresson. Earl Skule, brother of King Inge, supported Guttorm's party. Meetings were held on each side and at some point, some of Håkon's followers declared that "they would gladly go to the ordeal on behalf of the boy rather than he should lose the inheritance of his fathers."¹²⁴ Among the persons ready to be submitted to the ordeal was Håkon's mother, Inga. The saga says that she fasted in Peter's Church for the ordeal of iron. The scheme failed however, as the irons mysteriously disappeared during the night. A new opportunity came in autumn the next year, when Archbishop Guttorm and Skule invited the king to again put his paternity to the trial by ordeal. The archbishop pressed hard for Håkon to accept the ordeal:

The archbishop and earl begged this of you that the ordeal of iron which was offered on your behalf that spring when you were chosen to the kingdom, may now come about; so that the stories of those may be set at naught who of yore have any doubt of your fatherhood. Now if you will have it so done, and God bears you good witness in this matter, then they will honor you as their true lord, and show you all kingly honor.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ *sogdu að þeir villdu gladdliga ganga til skjirslu fyrir Hakon kongsson helldur enn hann* (HsH, Ch. 13).

¹²⁵ *Erchibiskup ok Jarl baðu yðr þess herra konungr at þa jarn-burðr er bopin uar af yðuari hendi þat uar er þer uðrut til konungf teknir at hann skyldi nv fram koma til þess at þeira manna fjögn fe onyt. er aþr hafa nóckut ef vm yðuart faðerni. Nv ef þer vilít sua gert hafa. Ok beri guþ yðr got vítni um þetta mal. vilia þeir þa yðr tigna fem sinn fanan herra. ok ueíta yðr alla konungliga tign, konungr fagði.* (HsH, Ch. 41).

The offer was judged hard by the king and his supporters. In the meantime, the *pings* had hailed Håkon king and his supporters argued that the cause did not need further proof. Yet they agreed for Inga, Håkon's mother, to undergo the trial on behalf of her young son. The ritual was performed in front of the king, the archbishop, the earl and other nobles of the land.¹²⁶ John, Earl of Orkney is also said to have been present. The second part of the ritual, when the hands of Inga were unbound, took place in Christ Church in front of the most prominent members of the aristocracy. Like for Eirik, the ordeal was a success and proved the king's rights. What is most interesting here, however, is the role of the archbishop. Although he was not responsible for the first demand for an ordeal, the saga clearly shows that he played a personal role in the second one.

A Tool of Mystification

We do not know for sure the level of implication of Archbishops Eystein, Eirik and their canons in the ordeals of Eirik and Margaret, although we have strong suspicions in the last case. By contrast, Bishop Nicholas and Archbishop Guttorm acted openly. Their demand that candidates undergo the ordeal was in clear contradiction with the Church's official position, which opposed the practice of the ordeal or at least priestly participation in the ritual. Condemnations of ordeals had been repeatedly formulated throughout the 12th century and were therefore well known in Norway. The *Canones Nidrosiensis* (1153–1177) considered the ordeal by iron as *indecent* and *indecorum*, “indecent” and “inappropriate,” and forbade it with great vehemence.¹²⁷ In a letter to the archbishop of Nidaros Eystein in 1169, Pope Alexander III condemned the use of ordeals which it considered as contrary to the Christian teachings.¹²⁸ Contemporary clerics, such as Theodorichus Monachus in his *Historia de Antiquitate* or the anonymous author of *Ágrip* also expressed their opposition to God's judgment. Commenting the ordeal of Harald Gille, Theodoricus considered it as *contra ecclesiasticam censuram*, “contrary to ecclesiastical decisions” whereas for the author of *Ágrip*, the same test was considered *frekefft*, “excessive.”¹²⁹ In 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, Pope Innocent III forbade priests to cooperate in ordeals.¹³⁰ Due to his position, Guttorm was thus

126 *HsH*, Ch. 45.

127 *Canones XIV* (*LD*, 42–51)

128 *LD*, 76.

129 *Historia*, Ch. 34; *Ágrip*, Ch. 58.

130 *nec quisquam purgationi aquae ferventis vel frigidae seu ferri candentis ritum cuiuslibet benedictionis aut consecrationis impendat*, “Nor may anyone confer a rite of blessing or consecration on a purgation by ordeal of boiling or cold water or of the red-hot iron” (*Concilium Lateranense IV*, Canon 18).

perfectly well aware of the Church's views. Despite all these repeated interdictions, however, Archbishop Guttorm did not have any scruples about demanding the judgment of the ordeal for Håkon.

The examples above shows that the Norwegian clergy did not simply ensure the test was carried out correctly, but also used it to further their political aim to choose a king favorable to the Church or to gain personal advantages in supporting someone's candidacy, like in the case of Bishop Nicholas. Indeed the manipulations of Bishop Nicholas and the unscrupulous exploitation by Archbishop Guttorm seemed not to have been an oddity in the eyes of their contemporaries. Snorri Sturluson had no doubts that the ritual of ordeal was an ideal tool to achieve political aims. In his saga of St Olav, which he wrote at the turn of the 1230s, he recounts how King Olav accused his rival Sigurd Thorlakson of murder and ordered him to undergo an ordeal by hot iron to prove his innocence. It was all too clear to Sigurd that the trial was only a stratagem to get rid of him. In an address to his men, Sigurd declared that for the king it was "an easy matter to manage the iron ordeal."¹³¹

The unreliability of ordeals and their propensity for manipulation also appear clear in the account of Inga's trial in 1218. It tells that a Flemish foreigner secretly proposed to help Inga to pass successfully the test with "a trick which shall not fail."¹³² He had an herb that he could rub over Inga's hands and "she shall be able to bear this iron with steadfast heart and will become clear."¹³³ The proposition was promptly rejected and considered "falsehood and guile [...] and open treachery."¹³⁴

3 The Written Word and Royal Communication

In the second half of the 12th century the Norwegian Church gained a dominant position in rituals of kingship in a field already occupied by profane rituals. Thus, besides the introduction of extraneous ceremonies (crowning and anointing), the Church also penetrated a pre-existing ritual (*konungstekja*) and transformed it into a religious one. By contrast, the development of a literate culture in Norway in the mid-12th century was largely the doing of the Church and unfolded in a context of global lay illiteracy totally free of royal

¹³¹ *OH*, Ch. 145.

¹³² *eina líft þa er eckí fkal til faka* (*HsH*, Ch. 44).

¹³³ *hun fkal auraugliga bera mega þetta Jarn ok fkir* (*Ibid.*)

¹³⁴ *uerða falf ok flerð [...] ok opinber fuik* (*Ibid.*)

involvement.¹³⁵ In this section we will explore the contribution of ecclesiastic literate culture to the written communication of the Norwegian kingship up until the reign of King Sverre. We will first shortly examine charter production and thereafter analyze the more comprehensive literary production of the royal genealogies written in the Nidaros milieu.

Royal Charters and Chanceries

In second half of the 12th century, a new and significant medium of communication appeared in Norway: charters and diplomas.¹³⁶ Although the corpus of documents for this century is far from impressive, it shows a consistent and perceptible development from the mid-1150s onward. These documents were expressions of power and authority as they granted rights and privileges and enacted laws.¹³⁷ As such they were the prerogatives of those who possessed this power and authority: lay princes and ecclesiastical institutions. As such, the qualitative and quantitative development of diplomatic material also reflected the evolution of princely/royal/ecclesiastical power. The emergence of this corpus of charters thus follows the consolidation of royal as well as ecclesiastical power in Norway from 1150 onwards.

On the whole it must be stated that charter production as a whole was very limited and never matched the average charter production of the great monarchies in Western Europe.¹³⁸ Between 1150 and 1200, from registers and narrative material we reach a total of 62: 18 extant letters and 44 documents which are now lost, but are mentioned in documentary material.¹³⁹ In order to assess the effective chancery output, Michael Clanchy assumes that the extant production must be multiplied by 15.¹⁴⁰ Projecting these estimates onto the Norwegian material, we can assume that around 930 letters were issued by the royal and ecclesiastical scriptoria during the period, a yearly output of nearly 19. This corpus is not only poor, but also complex to interpret, as half of the dates are

135 The issue of lay literacy in Norway until the 12th century is interesting. Unfortunately, in the current state of knowledge we know nearly nothing about it. Scholars though agree that the level must have been extremely weak. See Melve 2001, 127–130; Nedkvitne 2004, 11–35.

136 Although Snorri readily mentions in his sagas written correspondence between princes in the preceding century, the corpus of charters and letters extant is very weak before that date. Agerholt 1932, 639 ff.

137 G.A. Blom. 1967. *Kongemakt og Privilegier i Norge inntil 1387*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget: 56 ff.

138 GuyotJeannin 2006.

139 *Regesta Norvegica* I.

140 Clanchy 1993, 57ff.

unsure and the location is missing in the great majority of cases. Only 6 documents give an indication of the place of their redaction. Apparently this production was distributed equally between the crown and the Church. The Church was responsible for 33 documents: 11 extant and 22 registered. These letters were internal correspondence between the bishoprics and letters to the popes. The kings are credited with 29 charters or letters: 7 extant and 22 registered. As we see, the yearly production of the royal and ecclesiastic 'chanceries' was frail, even revalorized by Clanchy's method: respectively 0,58 (8,7 after Clanchy) and 0,66 (9,9 *ibid.*).

At first sight, these numbers do not reveal any superiority of the ecclesiastical over the royal chanceries. A closer look at the corpus of royal charters will demonstrate that Norwegian bishops and monks were responsible for the writing of the great majority of royal charters in the 12th century.

The involvement of the Church in royal charter production is threefold. First, the clerics largely monopolized written competency. This means that kings necessarily relied on ecclesiastics in their direct entourage to write their texts. Norwegian kings had priests and chaplains at their court who may have officiated as official scribes. We assume that under King Sverre, his *hirð*-priests were in charge of the chancery.¹⁴¹ Moreover, clerics also largely monopolized competency in Latin. Thus of these 29 scripts, 16 were written in Latin. 12 were addressed to ecclesiastic institutions (the Church as a whole and monasteries) and 6 had foreign addressees (foreign kings). In view of the state of literacy in lay society, the language clearly points to ecclesiastic scribes. Furthermore, beyond this monopoly on Latin, we can also ascribe the writing of royal charters to the Church if we consider the tradition for ecclesiastic institutions to write the letters of privileges which a prince granted them themselves. On the whole it seems thus that very few documents escaped the Church in 12th-century Norway.

Finally, the most blatant evidence of the Church's involvement in royal charter production is not quantitative, but qualitative. I refer here to the *Law of Royal Succession* (1163) and the letter of privileges (1163/77), which the scholarship unanimously agrees are to be attributed to none other than Archbishop Eystein.¹⁴² The *Law of Royal Succession* was written in connection with the crowning of King Magnus in Bergen in 1163 and put an end to the principle of joint kingship which had dominated in Norway in favor of individual succession. The letter of privileges, which most probably was written

141 Sverre Bagge. 1976. *Den Kongelige Kapellgeistlighet 1150–1319*. Universitetsforlaget: 62–66.

142 E. Vandvik. 1946–1948. "Magnus Erlingssons kroningseid." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 34: 625–637; Tobiassen 1964: 181–273; Blom 1967, 83–106.

by Archbishop Eystein, was issued in the name of King Magnus Erlingsson and also bore decisive implications for the Norwegian crown. The letter not only granted the Church important economic privileges (the right to export grain to Iceland, tithes from royal estates) and jurisdictional rights (free election of bishops), it also laid emphasis on the king's duty to protect the Church. In particular, it ascribed the archdiocese of Nidaros a decisive role in the Norwegian kingship. The arenga of the letter thus contains several principles which subordinated royal authority to that of the archbishop: the gift of the realm to St Olav (*cum regno in perpetuum et glorioso martyri regi Olaui integraliter speciali deuotione secundo post dominum regnum assigno Norwegie*) and the offering of the crown to his cathedral (*regale diadema et meum, quod hodierna die sacro altari in confinacionem offero*).¹⁴³ Of course, the absence of extant royal charters prevents any comparison. Yet the fact remains that the central documents for the Norwegian kingship in the mid-12th century were largely the work of the Church.

While the Church dominated the field of charter production in Norway at least from the mid-12th century, we know very little about ecclesiastical and royal chanceries.

We do not know much about the pre-existing administrative structure of the bishopric of Nidaros prior to the foundation of the province in 1152/53. Yet the administration of a province comprising six bishoprics on isolated islands around the North Sea (Gardar, Hólar, Skálholt, Kirkjubó, Kirkjubæjarkot, Sodor) and four bishoprics on mainland Norway (Bergen, Stavanger, Oslo, Hamar) most certainly encouraged the establishment of a permanent and centralized structure in the metropolis in the following decades.¹⁴⁴ Ecclesiastic charters contain more frequent indications about their place of location, providing valuable insights into the system of chanceries in the province. Out of the 33 charters written by an ecclesiastic institution between 1150 and 1200, 16 were written by the scribes of Nidaros. Second was the chancery of Skálholt in Iceland with seven acts in total and that of the Bishop of Oslo with six.

Although we have royal charters from the early 12th century, the Norwegian king did not have any administrative apparatus capable of handling the regular making of charters and other letters before the mid-13th century. Before that date, the royal chancery – if we can even speak of one – remained largely embryonic and without a permanent location or regular functioning.¹⁴⁵ For a long time, the itinerant character of the kingship obviously restricted the

¹⁴³ *NgL* I, 443.

¹⁴⁴ Imsen 2012a; Bagge 2003a, 51–79.

¹⁴⁵ Nedkvitne 2004, 68–71; Melve 2001, 132–133.

development of the institution. Our knowledge about the function of chancellor is also scarce before the end of the 12th century. Up until then, the position of chancellor is believed to have been loosely purveyed to literate “passers-by.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed we do not know whether the function existed at all before King Sverre’s reign. Even at that time we barely have more than names.¹⁴⁷ We do not know the role of the archbishop of Nidaros in the chancery of King Magnus Erlingsson, although he most probably was the author of central laws. However, the reliance of the Norwegian king on the Church for administrative literacy would not be an oddity in a contemporary European context. For instance, Capetian kings and German emperors appointed as chancellors the archbishops of Reims, Mainz or Cologne.¹⁴⁸

As we have seen, the absence of a royal chancery did not prevent 12th-century Norwegian kings from making use of clerics’ competency in written Latin and their specific know-how in diplomatic writing. We argue that this exploitation was possible within the framework of the 12th-century system of royal government. This system was not centralized, but organized around the exploitation of local resources. Kings moved from place to place and resided in their towns for more or less long periods in order to collect resources and find food and accommodation for themselves and their followers. During their sojourns in their towns, kings could entrust the local clergy with the task of drafting letters and charters. The redaction of charters was also intimately connected to the existence of an archive, which Norwegian kings did not possess before the mid-13th century.¹⁴⁹ Medieval diplomacy was a conservative art, although not completely free from innovation.¹⁵⁰ Scribes often relied on earlier documents to draft new ones and in particular on *ars dictaminis*, compilations of charter formulas.¹⁵¹ Royal itinerant scribes could have ‘chartriers,’ compendiums of charters which they could consult to find models. Monasteries and churches however were the

146 Helle 1964, 50.

147 Bagge 2010a, 256ff.

148 Martin 1988, 135–136; Olivier Guillot *et al.* (1994) 2003. *Pouvoirs et institutions dans la France médiévale. Des temps féodaux aux temps de l’État*. Paris: Armand Colin: 249–251; Heinrich Reincke. 1906. *Der alte Reichstag und der neue Bundesrat*. Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr.

149 Einar Blix. 1964. “Hadde Norge et Riksarkiv i Middelalderen.” *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 43: 165–180.

150 Jérôme Belmon. 2001. “In Conscribendis donationibus hic ordo servandus est...” in Zimmermann, 2001a: 283–320; Sebastien Barret. 2001. “Ad Captandam Nenevolentiam’ Stéréotype et inventivité dans les préambules d’actes médiévaux.” in Zimmermann 2001a, 321–336; Michel Zimmermann. 2001b. “Vie et mort d’un formulaire: l’écriture des actes catalans (xe–viiie).” in Zimmermann 2001a: 337–358.

151 Guyotjeannin 2006, 223–225.

few institutions which possessed libraries. These libraries probably also contained charters of privileges and protection which kings granted to monasteries and convents. The granting or renewing of privileges to these institutions often accompanied a royal visit. It was then easy for the Norwegian kings to use the scriptorium and the monks of the monastery to write the letters.

The field of written communication in the 12th century did not limit itself to administrative texts. One of the most vivid expressions of the development of written culture in Norway concerns histories of kings. And there again the Church played a leading role.

Royal Genealogies

The most obvious contribution of the Norwegian clergy to the legitimization of Magnus Erlingsson's authority was the crowning of 1163, which we have already examined. However, another field of legitimization of royal power in European monarchies was what Bernard Guenée calls "historical propaganda."¹⁵² According to C.H. Haskins, author and founder of the axiom "The renaissance of the 12th century," the writing of histories counted among "the best expressions of the intellectual revival of the 12th century."¹⁵³ Over a period of forty years (1150–1190), no less than three different histories of the Norwegian kings were written: *Historia Norwegie* (*HN*), *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* (*Historia*) and *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasqqum* (*Ágrip*). These works, better known as the Norwegian synoptic, witness that in 12th-century Norway, the field of royal historiography was largely dominated by the Church and in particular by the metropolitan milieu of Nidaros.

The first of these histories, the *HN*, was probably written during the period between 1150 and 1200.¹⁵⁴ The second text is Theodoricus Monachus's *Historia*, which has been dated to the period 1161–1188 with a preference for the last decade.¹⁵⁵ The third text, a work given the name of *Ágrip*, must have been written between 1188 and 1200.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Guenée 1980, 332.

¹⁵³ Haskins 1955, 224.

¹⁵⁴ Lars Boje Mortensen and Inger Ekrem give very different dating in their study on the *Historia Norwegie*. Whereas Ekrem advocates for the text to have been written in connection with the foundation of the Norwegian archdiocese in 1152/53, Mortensen gives a rougher dating in the second half of the 12th century. See Inger Ekrem and Lars B. Mortensen (ed.) 2003. *Historia Norwegie*. Museum Tusculanum: 11–24 and 156–225.

¹⁵⁵ David and Ian McDougall. 1998. "Introduction." In David and Ian McDougall (ed.) *Theodoricus Monachus. The Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*. University College London: vii–xiii.

¹⁵⁶ *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasqqum*, ed. M.J. Driscoll, Viking Society For Northern Research, University College London 1995: introduction.

These texts are all historical writings providing the genealogy of the Norwegian kings. Yet their scope differs slightly. *HN* starts with a vivid geographical description of Norway and of the territories around the North Sea. It also gives an overview of the royal lineage of the Norwegian kings from the mythical Yngling kings to Olav Haraldsson (1015). The manuscript of *HN* is incomplete but suggests an ambitious work and we estimate that less than half of the text is extant.¹⁵⁷ In view of the prologue it appears clear that the author intended to cover the whole history of the Norwegian kings up to his own time. The *Historia* covers the history of the Norwegian Kings spanning from Harald Fair-hair in about 870 to the death of Sigurd Magnusson, the Crusader, in 1130. The *Ágrip* is a shorter account, starting with the reign of Harald Fairhair around 880 and ending in 1136 with King Inge the Hunchback. It is believed however that the text probably continued down to 1177 when Sverre ascended the throne. The Norwegian synoptic have much in common and scholars have long attempted to determine the extent of their relationship. In particular, the *Historia* and the *Ágrip* share so many similarities that different hypotheses have stressed that both texts most probably derived from a lost common source which remains unidentified.¹⁵⁸

Although the Norwegian synoptics retraced the Norwegian kings' genealogy, the crown was only marginally involved. On the contrary, royal historiography in the second half of the 12th century was largely integrated into the communication system of the Church. This is reflected in the location of production, the authorship, the language used, its audience, and finally the very purpose of the works.

Nidaros. A Historiographic Center

The Norwegian synoptic were all the products of clerics and most particularly of the intellectual milieu of Nidaros. *HN* was the work of an anonymous author. According to the prologue, the text was commissioned and refers to a certain *Agnelle* whose identity remains unknown. Scholars agree that in view of the impressive quality of the text, both in its style and level of learning, the author was a prominent Norwegian cleric who certainly had studied abroad. They fail however to identify this prelate and the place of composition with accuracy. Inger Ekrem strongly linked *HN* to Nidaros. In her view, the work was meant to legitimize the creation of a Norwegian archiepiscopal province with Nidaros as its metropolitan see. She suggests Archbishop Eystein, curate of King Inge

¹⁵⁷ Ekrem and Mortensen 2003, 8–10.

¹⁵⁸ T.M. Andersson. 1985. "King's Sagas (Konungasögur)" in C.J. Clover and J. Lindow (ed.) *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*. Ithaca, London: Islandica XLV: 201–212.

Haraldsson at the time, as the author of the text or the dedicatee.¹⁵⁹ In the same study, Mortensen believes that the connection to Nidaros is the least probable and puts forward other Norwegian ecclesiastic milieus (Bergen, Stavanger, Oslo and Hamar) and even Danish or German centers.¹⁶⁰ The link to the metropolitan see grows stronger with *Ágrip*. However, our knowledge is deficient as the work lacks a prologue and the end is missing. The author of *Ágrip* is not known, but he most probably was a Norwegian cleric. It is believed that the author may have belonged to the archdiocese, because in the text he shows some familiarity with the town of Nidaros and its surroundings.¹⁶¹ The last work has more explicit links with Nidaros. The prologue of the *Historia* clearly mentions that it was written by Theodoricus Monachus in honor of Eystein Erlendsson, Archbishop of Nidaros.¹⁶² The identity of Theodoricus has been the subject of different hypotheses. Based on 'Monachus,' the Norwegian historian Ludvig Daae suggests that he was a Benedictine monk from the neighboring abbey of Nidarholm.¹⁶³ As Theodoricus was the Latin form for the Norwegian name Tore, our author has been identified with Bishop Tore of Hamar and a Canon from the church of Hallvard in Oslo, Tore Gudmundsson, who was to become Archbishop of Nidaros (1206–1214).¹⁶⁴

A Clerical Audience

Written in Latin, the Norwegian synoptic primarily aimed at a local and limited circle of clerics. Two of these histories were written in Latin (*Historia Norwegie*, *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagensium*), and were thus destined to a circle literate in Latin, clerics but maybe also a literate lay elite. At the same time, with Latin being the *lingua franca* of medieval Europe, these histories potentially were destined for both a local and a foreign audience. In this respect, it has even been argued that *HN* aimed at the papal curia.¹⁶⁵ The *Historia* on the other hand originally was a work destined for the library of

159 Ekrem and Mortensen 2003, 218–223.

160 *Ibid.*, 15–24.

161 Driscoll 1995, xi–xii; «Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sogum» by T. Tobiassen, *KLNM* Vol. 1: 60.

162 *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagensium*, in G. Storm (ed.) *Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ*. Kristiana 1880: 1.

163 Ludvig Daae. 1895. "Om Historieskriveren 'Theodoricus monachus' og om Biskop Thore af Hamar." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) rk. 3, Vol. 3: 297–411.

164 Lars B. Mortensen. 2005. "Den norske middelalderlitteratur på Latin." in Steinar Imsen (red.) *Den Kirkehistoriske utfordring*. Tapir akademisk forlag: 143; A.O. Johnsen. 1939. *Om Theodoricus og hans historie de antiquitate regum Norwagensium*. PhD-thesis, Det Norske Videnskabs-Akademi, Oslo.

165 Ekrem and Mortensen, 2003, 166–168.

Nidaros Cathedral. It is obviously aimed at a local audience as it assumes a good knowledge in local geography and in the lineage of the persons mentioned.¹⁶⁶ The *Ágrip* is the sole work composed in the vernacular and for this reason was obviously aimed at a local and larger audience of illiterates. To illustrate the point, Archbishop Eystein is mentioned in the text in a way that presupposes a certain familiarity with his personage.¹⁶⁷

Assessing the success of a work and its diffusion in the Middle Ages is no easy task. Because the making of a book was costly in terms of both time and energy, it is assumed that the number of copies reflected the need of the 'market.' One did not use time and money to make a copy of a book that nobody wanted to read. The number of manuscripts extant thus can give us a good idea of a work's diffusion. It appears rather clear that none of the Norwegian synoptics was widely spread. *HN*, *Historia* and *Ágrip* are known to us in two or three pre-14th-century manuscripts each.¹⁶⁸ In Bernard Guenée's view, two or less manuscripts extant testify a very limited success on a European scale.¹⁶⁹ This quantitative estimation is of course conjectural. It does not tell us how many people actually read the same book. For instance, the content of a book potentially reached a greater audience through reading out loud. A book could also have great local appeal. Thus the author of *Ágrip* knew the *Historia* very well and relied on it to pen his own work. Both works came from the same area, the region of Nidaros, which could mean that the *Historia* was well known among locals.

An Instrument in the Service of the Church

So far we have assessed the main character of these genealogies: They were written by clerics and to a large extent reached an ecclesiastic audience. The purpose of these royal genealogies was in keeping with this dominant clerical character.

The very words of their authors bring some insight here. Much of *Ágrip* is missing, but the work was given the title of *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, or 'Short summary of the histories of the kings of Norway' by Finnur Magnússon,

166 Driscoll 1995, x- xi; Mortensen 2000b, 150–151.

167 Mortensen 2000b, 151.

168 Ekrem and Mortensen 2003, 21–22, 28–43; Karen Skovgaard-Petersen. 2002. "Et håndskriftfund i Lübeck ca. 1620 om den spinkle overlevering af to Norske nationalklenodier." *Fund og Forskning*, Vol. 41: 107–127; Driscoll 1995, ix.

169 Bernard Guenée has worked out a table that tentatively assesses the success of a manuscript in the Middle Ages: very great success over 60 manuscript extant, great success for ca. 30, limited for ca. 15, weak for ca. 6, and null for 2 or less. Guenée 1980, 255.

which gives a quite respectful account of the narrative. According to the author of *HN*, his text simply aimed to “recreate the genealogy of its [Norwegian] rulers and to reveal both the arrival of Christianity and the expulsion of heathendom.”¹⁷⁰ For his part, Theodoricus writes that he “thought it proper to record for posterity these relics of our forefathers.” He also mentions that some parts of the texts are meant “to delight the mind of the reader.”¹⁷¹ Chronicles of kings, accounts of the conversion of the Norwegians, conservation of past knowledge and entertainment, behind this plurality of purposes hides a vision of the past that served the Norwegian Church’s policies and more particularly its head: the Archbishopric of Nidaros.

The work most intimately connected with this project remains *HN*. *HN* is a problematic source as it seems to have been the greatest text of 12th-century Norway both in terms of length and wealth of detail, but the text of which the least survives. This situation has given rise to several free interpretations.

In the late 1990s Inger Ekrem formulated a tentative theory which places the *HN* in a Norwegian and ecclesiastical propagandistic context.¹⁷² In her view, *HN* was a block in the argumentation for the separation of Norway from the archdiocese of Lund and the promotion of Nidaros as the head of an autonomous archbishopric over Norway and the whole North Sea realm. In this respect, the geographical description of the land bordering the North Sea associated with the chronicle of kings aimed to ascribe the whole area a sense of unity and community. Such a strategy sustained and legitimized the existence *per se* of a single ecclesiastical province. Moreover, in attributing to the kingdom of Norway an illustrious royal lineage and, in particular in laying emphasis on the descent of later kings from St Olav, the text implicitly emphasized the role of St Olav and by way of consequence the importance of Nidaros, the place where his relics were conserved. *HN* can thus be considered less a factual historical work than a work of propaganda for the archdiocese of Nidaros. Ekrem’s interpretation nonetheless has many weak points. A major one concerns the dating of the work. Lars B. Mortensen has convincingly argued that *HN* was most probably written after the foundation of the archbishopric province. Mortensen cannot find evidence for a precise dating of the work and suggests a broad period between 1150 and 1200.¹⁷³ However, even though Ekrem’s theory falls

170 *describere eiusque rectorum genealogiam retexere et aduetum christianitatis simul et paganism fugam* (*HN*, 51).

171 *dignum putavi hæc, pauca licet, majorum nostrorum memoriæ posteritatis tradere and ad delectandum animum lectoris* (*Historia*, 1–2).

172 Ekrem and Mortensen 2003, 155–225.

173 *Ibid.*, 11–24.

short, her arguments are still relevant in the broader context of the 12th century. In the decades that followed its creation, the archdiocese was still a fragile construction. This was true not the least in the difficult context of the struggle for royal succession. In a time when political dissent and divisions of loyalty led to regional separatism, the unity and integrity of the province needed to be consolidated. Similarly, any emphasis on the life of St Olav could only contribute to strengthen the prestige and the authority of Nidaros.

To a large extent, the Norwegian synoptics organized the genealogy of Norwegian kings around St Olav. The centrality of St Olav to the Norwegian synoptics is reflected quantitatively. *Historia* and *Ágrip* ascribe King Olav Haraldsson a fundamental position in the genealogy of Norwegian kings. Theodoricus dedicates six chapters out of 34 to King Olav Haraldsson (ch. 13–19). In addition to these chapters, two digressions are also connected to Olav (ch. 17, 20). The *Ágrip*, which builds much on Theodoricus' work, has 12 chapters about Olav from a total of 60 known chapters (ch. 22–33). The work is also missing its end, which prevents us from gauging the importance of the topic in its totality. It is difficult to know how much space the author of *HN* intended to dedicate to King Olav as the work has come to us incomplete. Only the three last chapters tell about St Olav (ch. XVI, XVII and XVIII). However, as Lars B. Mortensen has argued, the level of detail in the text extant suggests a long and ambitious work, which potentially exceeded *Historia* and *Ágrip*.¹⁷⁴

Qualitatively, King Olav also held a privileged place in the histories which corresponded to his centrality in the Christianization of the kingdom. *Historia* discusses King Olav's achievements in the conversion of Norway around three pivotal moments: his baptism (ch. 13), his missions against the heathens (ch. 18) and finally his martyrdom (ch. 19). This decisive moment encapsulates the true nature of King Olav, his abhorrence for violence, the tenacity of his faith and his dedication to justice. In *Ágrip* King Olav Haraldsson is also presented as the great artisan behind the conversion of Norwegians: "St Óláfr became king of Norway and strengthened his kingdom through Christianity."¹⁷⁵ His missionary achievements however are not exalted to the same extent as in *Historia*. The author of *Ágrip* underlines that St Olav "had his mind much set on worldly victory [...] later turned his faith to Christianity and through his steadfast belief gained eternal bliss and sanctity."¹⁷⁶ *HN* ends abruptly with St Olav's return to Norway in 1015, and we do not know how the text portrayed his

¹⁷⁴ Mortensen 2003, 371.

¹⁷⁵ *helgi Óláfr við Nóregis ríki ok styrkði ríki sitt með kristni* (*Ágrip*, Ch. 36).

¹⁷⁶ *hafði hug sinn mjök á veraldar sigri [...] veik síðan trú sinni til kristni ok laut af staðfestu trúar eilífa sælu ok helgi*. (*Ágrip*, Ch. 34).

achievements. There is little doubt however that Olav was given as favorable a treatment as in the other texts. One proof of the king's preeminent position is the reference to him as *Olauum perpetuum regem Norwegie*, "Olav everlasting king of Norway."¹⁷⁷ This very terminology echoes the letter of privileges to the Church (1163–1181), which stated that all kings after King Magnus Erlingsson were vassals of St Olav and held the kingdom of Norway as a fiefdom.¹⁷⁸

The centrality of St Olav went beyond the account of his personal achievements. It shaped the very narrative of the succession of kings. Thus King Olav Haraldsson was not the only major figure behind the progress of Christendom in Norway. In the Norwegian synoptics King Olav Tryggvason, Olav Haraldsson's predecessor, is also portrayed as a key contributor. Thus while Theodoricus' account mentions Olav Tryggvason's failure to convert Norway it also clearly stresses the king's zealous activity in the cause of Christianity as the evangelizer of Iceland and Orkney.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, *HN* clearly lays emphasis on King Olav Tryggvason's contribution to the conversion of the Western Isles (ch. xvii). In *Ágrip*, Olav Tryggvason is the king who "Christianized five countries: Norway, Iceland, Shetland, Orkney and the fifth, the Faroes."¹⁸⁰ The emphasis on King Olav Tryggvason's contribution to the Christianization of the kingdom was not without ulterior motives. It allowed the history of Norway to be shaped on the model of Biblical history. Thus, in the great scheme of the Christianization of Norway, King Olav Tryggvason was like St John the Baptist, who according to the Old Testament was a forerunner of Jesus and announced his coming.¹⁸¹ King Olav Tryggvason was the precursor of King Olav Haraldsson and the achievements of the first King Olav paved the way for the second king and his martyrdom.

The centrality of King Olav in the historiographic production of the second half of the 12th century cannot but be seen beyond the overall program for developing of the saint's cult. The cult of St Olav centered on Nidaros, where his relics lay. It ascribed the cathedral and its archbishop great prestige and generated both economic benefits from pilgrimages and political authority. As we have seen, the veneration of St Olav developed significantly under Archbishop Eystein. It motivated the rebuilding of Nidaros Cathedral, in particular the construction of the choir which was to host the shrine of the

¹⁷⁷ *HN*, Ch. xv.

¹⁷⁸ *LD*, nr. 9.

¹⁷⁹ *Historia*, Ch. 9 and 12.

¹⁸⁰ *Í Nóregi krisnaði hann.v. lǫnd: Nóreg ok Ísland ok Hjaltland, Orkneyjar ok it.v. Færeyjar.* (*Ágrip*, Ch. 19).

¹⁸¹ Matthew 17:11–13.

saint.¹⁸² Eystein also stood behind the making of a new liturgy centered on St Olav, *Ordo Nidrosiensis*, which was completed in the early 1170s.¹⁸³ A text we have not mentioned previously, because it is not a historical work *per se* and not a genealogy of the Norwegian kings like the Norwegian Synoptics, played a central role in this enterprise. The *Passio et miracula Beati Olavi (PO)* was a Latin text probably written during the episcopate of Eystein Erlendsson (1161–1188). It recounts the life of Saint King Olav Haraldsson, his missionary activity and his martyrdom. The *Passio* was intimately connected to the cult of St Olav as it was meant to be used in the liturgy.¹⁸⁴ A rather complex connection exists between *PO* and the Norwegian synoptics, each of the works possibly being a source of inspiration for each other.¹⁸⁵

Beyond the Christianization of Norway and the contribution of the kings, the Norwegian synoptics broadcast the ideal of a kingship dedicated to the development of the Christian religion and to the protection of the weak and of the clergy. The ideal of the *rex iustus* recurs repeatedly in the Norwegian genealogies. King Olav was “to keep wicked men and criminals from prosecuting those who were good; to confirm the *pings* which had been ordained by Christ and, if it could be done, of the hardest stones to rise up children of Abraham.”¹⁸⁶ His descendant, King Olav Haraldsson (1067–1093) is depicted as “a man dear to both God and men, who made every effort to achieve a state of peace and concord.”¹⁸⁷ Finally, King Eystein Magnusson (1103–1123) “was a paragon of honesty who governed himself no less than his subjects with moderation and

182 Øystein Ekroll. 2012. «Erkebiskop Eystein, Oktogonen i Kristkyrkja og Kristi Gravkyrkje i Jerusalem.» in *Eystein Erlendsen – Erkebiskop, politiker og kirkebygger*. Nidaros Domkirkes Restaureringsarbeider: 45–76.

183 Hankeln 2012, 133–157.

184 The legend was used during church service, for instance to be read out loud during the monks common meals. Some parts of the text were also directly used in the office. *Ibid.*, 110.

185 Mortensen and Mundal 2003, 368–373; About the relationship between *PO* and *HN* see, Lars B. Mortensen. 2000a. “The Anchin manuscript of *Passio Olavi* (Douai 295), William of Jumièges, and Theodoricus Monachus. New evidence for intellectual relations between Norway and France in the 12th century.” *Symbolae Osloenses* 75: 165–189; Inger Ekrem. 2000. “Om *Passio Olavi* tilblivelse og eventuelle forbindelse med *Historia Norwegie*.” in Ekrem, Inger et al. (red.) *Olavslegenden og den latinske historieskrivning I 1100-tallets Norge*. Museum Tusculanums Forlag: 108–156.

186 *Remota omni ambiguitate, ut sceleratos et iniquos a bonorum persecution compesceret, Christi sancita stabili ret, de durissimis lapidibus si fieri potuisset filios Abrahæ suscitaret.* (*Historia*, Ch. 19).

187 *Vir Deo et hominibus carus, paci per Omnia et quieti temporum* (*Historia*, Ch. 29).

wisdom. He was a king who loved peace, an assiduous manager of public affairs and above all a fosterer of the Christian religion.”¹⁸⁸

On the whole, the Norwegian synoptics conveyed an ecclesiastical vision of kings and kingship. The history of the Norwegian kings was interpreted within the framework of Biblical history, making the Christianization of the realm a central theme. The genealogies of Norwegian kings glorified their involvement in the defense of the Christian religion. Their attributes, qualities and deeds, epitomized in the figure of the king and martyr, St Olav, provided a model shaped by the Church for later kings to follow.

Royal Histories and the Legitimization of Kingship

In spite of the Norwegian synoptics’ clear ecclesiastical character and the equally clear absence of royal involvement, we can still question whether the royal genealogies conveyed views and values beneficial for the Norwegian kings or not. Indeed, although the genealogies had ecclesiastic aims, they still were histories of kings and for this reason alone they may in some respects have been a medium for communication for the Norwegian kingship.

As we pointed out earlier, the Church’s most decisive contribution to Magnus Erlingsson’s legitimacy was the establishing of a sacred monarchy. Through his coronation and anointment, King Magnus was made the sole legitimate ruler in Norway and the royal office was now a function bearing the indelible mark of God. The *Law of Royal Succession* of 1163 sought to establish the principle of sole succession instead of the co-ruling system. The Norwegian crown was thus now based on the two pivotal principles of monarchy and the sanctity of the royal office. Were these principles conveyed in the Norwegian synoptics?

Monarchic Rule and Royal Legitimacy

First it must be noted that the core event of the new kingship, the crowning ceremony of 1163, is totally absent from the three histories for different reasons. The manuscripts of *HN* and *Ágrip* have only survived in fragments and we will never know what space they dedicated to the coronation as their narratives stop in 1015 and 1136 respectively. The *Historia* does not provide any more insights as its author refused to write about the years following the death of King Sigurd Magnusson (1130) on the grounds that the events that followed

188 *Augustinus extitit probitate conspicuus, moderation et prudentia non minus se ipsum quam subjectos regens, rex pacificus, rerum publicarum diligens administrator, christianæ religionis (Historia, Ch. 32).*

were too brutal to be recorded in the written word. Obviously the importance of the events of 1163 did not counterbalance his aversion to unrest and feud.

It is clear that none of the synoptics clearly supported or condemned one system. Co-rule could at times be a source of peace and prosperity, whereas a single king could incarnate tyranny. *HN* does not express any particular views on legitimate and illegitimate royal inheritance or the principle of primogenitary birthright, nor does it condemn the system of shared kingship. Similarly, despite the fact that the author of *Ágrip* probably showed some degree of partisanship in the struggle for royal succession, his work does not display underlying arguments for or against monarchy or about primogenitary rights. Thus, when King Sigurd dies in 1130, the author is very critical of Harald Gille's claims to rule together with King Magnus Sigurdsson. Later, however, when the three kings, Inge Haraldsson, Sigurd Munn and Eystein Haraldsson, shared the kingdom, our author judges that they "governed the kingdom [...] bravely and in accordance with the law of the land."¹⁸⁹

Ágrip's ambivalence is not shared in Theodoricus's work. On several occasions, the author of the *Historia* portrays shared kingship negatively as a source of unrest and war, thereby indirectly advocating monarchic principles. Commenting on King Sveinn of Denmark and Earl Eirik's sharing of Norway after their victory over King Olav Tryggvason, Theodoricus explains Eirik's decision to leave for England as a means of avoiding fratricide, and illustrates the point by quoting Lucan: "There is no faith between sharers in sovereignty; and all power will be impatient of a consort."¹⁹⁰ Finally, recounting the agreement between King Magnus Olavsson and his uncle, Harald, to share the kingdom, Theodoricus tells of the Norwegian magnates' opposition and states that "They knew perfectly well that any kingdom divided within itself would go to ruin."¹⁹¹ It remains to be seen whether the author's criticism concerned the political system or was part of his general condemnation of violence and disorder.

Propaganda for King Magnus' Rights

In the context of political competition for the throne, the contribution of the synoptics to royal legitimacy could take on a more polemical character. The Church was strongly affected by the conflict and its involvement increased significantly during the period. After 1164, the Church was a faithful supporter of the ruling king, Magnus Erlingsson, against his opponent Sverre. Once their

189 *stýrt ríkinu með þeim eptir landslögum þeira* (*Ágrip*, Ch. LX).

190 *Nulla fides regni sociis omnisque potestas, impatiens consortis erit* (*Historia*, Ch. 14).

191 *Sciebant procul dubio omne regnum in se divisum desolandum* (*Historia*, Ch. 27).

champion was killed in 1184, however, the Church became more deeply involved and took over the leadership of the opposition to Sverre. Considering this chronology and the suggested dating of our three histories, *HN*, *Historia* and *Ágrip* may reflect the views of the Church in the conflict, and may possibly have played a part in clerical propaganda in support of King Magnus.

Given the manuscript's current state, it is impossible to know whether *HN* had a political agenda with respect to the civil war. The prologue does not say a single word on *HN* as a work of political propaganda and the narrative itself stops two centuries before the crisis.

The text of the *Historia* is assumed to have been written during the reign of King Magnus Erlingsson. As a member of the Norwegian clergy, Theodoricus Monachus could have used his text to favor Magnus's party. However, a close examination of the text does not reveal anything in this direction. On the contrary, to some extent it has been argued that the author may have supported – albeit indirectly – the legitimacy of Sverre, by giving credit to the claims of Harald Gille, his ancestor. This position however is an isolated phenomenon in the text and is not a part of a more comprehensive strategy of legitimizing Sverre's kingship. If Theodoricus had any sympathies he did not express them in his work.¹⁹² Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Theodoricus deliberately chose not to write about the conflict for royal succession. However, as the epilogue shows, Theodoricus was well aware of the country's political situation, and the fact that he deliberately left out the period of which he had most to tell clearly appears to have been a deliberate choice. Indeed, this omission may even be interpreted as a condemnation of clerical involvement in the conflict. In preaching and practicing non-interventionism, Theodoricus maybe put himself at odds with a more widespread practice of political interference.

Contrary to the *Historia*, it has been argued that *Ágrip* took part in the conflict, opposing the party of King Sverre and his Birkebeiners in the 1190s.¹⁹³ While the author was not critical of the system of co-ruling between the three kings, Inge Haraldsson, Sigurd Munn and Eystein Haraldsson, it is possible to discern a political partisanship in his portrayal of them. King Inge was the ancestor of King Magnus Erlingsson through his mother, a daughter of King

192 According to Bagge, Theodoricus was rather concerned with moral than political issues. He strongly doubts that *Historia* was meant to convey Theodoricus' views on his time. He concludes that "The distance between Theodoricus and contemporary events thus appears to have been greater than most scholars have assumed." Sverre Bagge. 1989. "Theodoricus Monachus – Clerical Historiography in Twelfth-century Norway." *Scandinavian Journal of History* Vol. 14: 132.

193 Driscoll 1995, xii.

Sigurd Magnusson. In the text, the author portrays King Inge as a fair man and popular with the people.¹⁹⁴ Magnus's enemy, King Sverre, claimed to be directly descended from King Sigurd Munn, a man depicted in *Ágrip* as "an overbearing man in every way and an unruly man."¹⁹⁵ With his contrasting description of Norwegian kings, the author of *Ágrip* intended to convince his audience of Sverre's tyrannous descent and of the honorable ancestry of King Magnus Erlingsson. The extant text stops with King Sigurd, and we are missing the crucial decades where the author's partisanship would have been more apparent. The propagandist character of the *Ágrip* is thus difficult to gauge and we will never know whether the work really was the partisan history it *a priori* seemed to be!

Demonstrating Royal Continuity and Sacralizing Royal Lineage

In being crowned and anointed, King Magnus was proclaimed king by the grace of God. He now owed his power and authority from God and was answerable only to Him. The coronation provided a legitimacy which King Magnus could not claim from his ancestors. However, it not only legitimized the power of one man for a specific time. It also created a dynastic legitimacy and "aimed at founding a new royal race at the image of the race of David, which was issued from a chain of divine elections."¹⁹⁶ The crowning ceremony of King Magnus Erlingsson was thus followed by a new law of succession which, in establishing the principle of legitimate birth and primogenitary rights, sought to secure dynastic succession.

Theodoricus's disdain for his own time and *HN* and *Ágrip*'s amputated narratives prevent us from assessing the Norwegian synoptics as eulogies of the new sacred king. However, in drawing the line of Norwegian kings in the ancient past and in particular in laying emphasis on the contribution of past kings to the Christianization of the country, the royal genealogies demonstrated royal continuity and sacralized the lineage of Norwegian kings.

In a general manner, historical texts fulfilled a legitimizing function. One of the most direct contributions of the Norwegian synoptics was to anchor the power and authority of the present kings in the past. The Norwegian synoptics gave sense to and organized the past, which otherwise would have appeared as a patternless chaos, around the life and achievements of kings. As such they

¹⁹⁴ *Ágrip*, Ch. LX.

¹⁹⁵ *ofstopamaðr mikill of alla hluti ok óeiramaðr* (*Ágrip*, Ch. LX).

¹⁹⁶ Yves Sassier. 2007. *Royauté et idéologie au Moyen Âge. Bas-Empire, monde franc, France (Ive – XIIe siècle)*. Paris: Armand Colin Sassier 2007, 121–129.

ascribed the Norwegian kingship a primordial role in the perception of both past and present reality and functioned as a legitimizing myth.

None of the three works attempted to make a clean slate of the past, for instance in starting their genealogy with Christian kings only. On the contrary, the Norwegian kings were part of an ancient lineage that went back to a mythical king Yngve according to *HN* and to the heathen king Harald Fairhair for the *Historia* and *Ágrip*. However, in dedicating space predominantly to the deeds of the Christian kings (the two Olavs), the Norwegian synoptics stress the fact that the kingdom of Norway was ruled by a line of kings who had worked for Christianity in the country since its very beginning. The association of the Norwegian kings with the conversion of the population could not but ascribe the living kings a sacral legitimacy justifying their authority over society. The sainthood of a past king, St Olav, who epitomized and personified this association, clearly played a pivotal role. We have previously underlined the profitable connection for the Church between St Olav and Magnus Erlingsson. If the promotion of the cult of St Olav strengthened the position of the Church in society and in relation to the king, it also had beneficial consequences for the Norwegian crown. Olav's sainthood was transferred to his successors. The presence of a royal saint sanctified the line of kings and enhanced their prestige. Such a glorious past and illustrious ancestor consolidated the Norwegian kingship as both Christian and rightful.

'Crowned Ass' and Learned Bishops

The preceding analysis leaves little doubt as to the nature of written communication in the mid-12th century: The actors and media were totally dominated by the Church. In 12th-century Norway, nearly every written word came from the scriptoria of bishops or from "the shelter of cloisters," to quote Guenée.¹⁹⁷ In addition to liturgical books, clerics produced royal histories and presumably were responsible for most charters and letters written in the realm. The authors and the audience of literary works as well as the addressees of charters belonged to a small elitist audience dominated by the clergy.

This domination was as much the result of the limits of lay literacy as of the Church's monopoly over the written word. Although the low clergy may not have been particularly literate, their superiors had received an education, sometimes from the most renowned institutions of Western Europe. In mid-12th century Norway, as everywhere in Europe, the bishops were the greatest patrons of literature and episcopal patronage dominated literary

197 Guenée 1980, 45.

production.¹⁹⁸ The most learned prince in Norway was not the king but Archbishop Eystein, legislator, author, patron of art, architect and creator of the greatest literary center in Norway, Nidaros.¹⁹⁹

We cannot link any contemporary works to the king or his milieu that do not bear the marks of ecclesiastic involvement. Even the existence of a cultural and literary milieu around the Norwegian king is questionable. King Magnus Erlingsson probably did not meet the new standards of literacy and culture which developed in European monarchies. Compared to Capetian, Plantagenet, Castilian and Aragonese kings, the Norwegian prince rather appeared as a “crowned ass” (*asinus coronatus*), to quote two contemporary authors, William of Malmesbury and John of Salisbury.²⁰⁰ It is probably not fair to apply the adage to King Magnus Erlingsson, as we know very little about Magnus’s cultural, intellectual and literary capacities. In many respects, he rather symbolized the old type of king, in spite of a reign which would see more innovations than any later king would experience. Both the author of *Sverris saga* and Snorri laid emphasis on the man’s appearance, his physical qualities, as well as his qualities as a military leader and orator. In *Sverris saga*, King Magnus is portrayed as “a very strong man, generous and liberal in his gifts, eloquent in speech,” and “surpassed others in feat of agility.”²⁰¹ In *Heimskringla* Snorri praises his leadership and skills as warrior.²⁰² We do not know whether he received an intellectual education, if he could read or write Latin or other languages. Furthermore, the sagas never present the princes engaging in any non-political or non-military activity.

198 *Ibid.*, 45–46.

199 Gunnes 1996; Iversen 2011.

200 “An illiterate king is no more than a crowned ass” (*rex illiteratus, asinus coronatus*). *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, v, no. 390, 170 and *Policraticus*, iv, 6. For Aragon see, Jaume Aurell. 2012. *Authoring the Past. History, Autobiography, and Politics in Medieval Catalonia*. The University of Chicago Press: 21–37. For the Plantagenêt kings see Martin Aurell. 2007b. *The Plantagenet Empire 1154–1224*. Pearson Education limited: 83–162; J.F. Benton. 1961. “The Court of Champagne as a literary center.” *Speculum* Vol. xxxvi, N° 4, October: 551–591; Yves Sassier. 1991. *Louis VII*. Paris: Fayard; Reto-Roberto Bezzola. (1969) 2011. *Les Origines et la Formation de la Littérature Courtoise en Occident, 500–1200*. Vol. III. Slatkine Reprints: 6–10; T.N. Bisson. 1991. *The Medieval Crown of Aragon. A short history*. Clarendon Press: 36–40; B.F. Reilly. 1998. *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under King Alfonso VII, 1126–1157*. Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press.

201 *hann var oc helldr fterc maðr. ar oc ftiornfamr fñiallr i mali, vera um-fram alla men at fimleic* (SvS, Ch. 98).

202 *sem hann mundi yfir alla ganga, ok hann mundi þá vera því meiri hermaðr en jarl, sem hann var yngri*. (ME, Ch. 44).

There is absolutely no evidence that the kingship was involved at any stage and in any way in the literature written during the reign of King Magnus Erlingsson. Royal patronage was virtually nonexistent. The king was not represented as a dedicatee either. Nor was he an isolated case. There is no trace of any direct or indirect involvement of the Norwegian lay magnates in any cultural or intellectual activity either.

As far as we can judge, the aristocracy's level of literacy must have been extremely low and their use of the written word marginal, despite the fact that in his *Heimskringla* (c. 1220) Snorri sporadically refers to epistolary correspondence between magnates in the 11th and 12th centuries.

The illiteracy of the lay aristocracy and *a fortiori* of the Norwegian society as a whole certainly was a serious obstacle to the use of literature as means of communication by the kingship. In 12th-century Norway, as in Western and Eastern Europe, the written word was the monopoly of the Church and its clerics, and remained foreign and unfamiliar to a king from a remote periphery marginally influenced by the cultural renewal of the 12th century renaissance.²⁰³

4 Nidaros: A Kings' "Factory"

The previous chapters have emphasized how crucial the formation of spaces of communication, that is loci of production and of reception, was in the archiepiscopal program of control over the communication of Norwegian kings. In Western Europe, the great monarchies were all sustained by specific monasteries and abbeys that provided kings and royal dynasties with ideological and intellectual support. These institutions acted principally as royal consecration sites performing coronations and royal funerals. The Castilian monarchs established the abbey of Santa Mariá la Real de las Huelgas in Burgos, founded by Alfonso VIII in 1187, as their royal 'pantheon,' which it remained until the mid-13th century.²⁰⁴ The Cathedral of the Savior in Zaragoza was the privileged coronation church for all Aragonese kings from 1204 onwards.²⁰⁵ From Harold Godwinson's coronation in 1066 onwards, all English

203 Menache 1990, 11–19; Anna Adamska. 1999. "The Introduction of Writing in Central Europe (Poland, Hungary and Bohemia)." In Mostert 1999a: 165–190; Martin 1988, 116–181.

204 Teofilo F. Ruiz. 1984. "Une royauté sans sacre: la monarchie castillane du bas Moyen Âge." *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*. 39e année, N. 3: 429–453.

205 J.L. Corral Lafuente. 2000. *La Seo del Salvador*. Zaragoza: Librería General.

kings were crowned in Westminster Abbey.²⁰⁶ But the most eloquent example remains the binomial institutions of the Abbey of St Denis and Reims Cathedral in Capetian France. These two institutions, only separated by 150 km, collaborated and competed at the same time to be the site of royal consecrations. St-Denis became the dynastic necropolis of all Capetian kings. The abbey also housed the French coronation regalia. However, St-Denis was not vested with the right of coronation, which fell to Reims Cathedral. Monasteries and regular churches were also major cultural centers for the writing of royal histories and biographies. Thus the monks of Santa Maria de Ripoll in Aragón, the ancient necropolis of the first Catalan Counts, were responsible for the writing of chronicles and histories praising the glorious past of the Counts of Aragon.²⁰⁷ In Capetian France, the writing of official histories too was centred in St-Denis from Suger's Life of Louis VI onwards.²⁰⁸

In view of this, the question to be asked is whether any clerical institution similar to those mentioned above supported the Norwegian kingship. The answer is negative. Although Christ Church in Bergen remained Norwegian kings' favoured consecration site throughout the High Middle Ages, both as a coronation church and as a necropolis, it did not acquire a monopolistic position. Nidaros and Oslo also hosted major consecrations. This lack however does not necessarily mean that there were no attempts to create a favoured site. Paradoxically, while earlier scholars have consistently acknowledged the decisive involvement of the archbishops of Nidaros in the making of a modern kingship in Norway, they have failed to see how this also was directed towards their cathedral.²⁰⁹ On the basis of a concordance of legal records and policies however, we will argue that, in the decades following the

206 Paul Binski. 1995. *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenêt: Kingship and the Representation of Power, 1200–1400*. Yale University Press; Schramm 1937.

207 Jaume Aurell. 2005. "From Genealogies to Chronicles: The Power of the Form in Medieval Catalan Historiography." *Viator* Vol. 36. Brepols Publishers: 235–264; T.N. Bisson. 1984. "L'essor de la Catalogne: identité, pouvoir et idéologie dans une société du XII^e siècle." *Annales, Économies. Sociétés. Civilisations*. Vol. 39: 459–479.

208 Gabrielle Spiegel. M. 1999a. "History as Enlightenment: Suger and the *Mos Anagogicus*." in Gabrielle M. Spiegel. *The Past as Text. The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*. Johns Hopkins University Press: 163–177; Gabrielle M. Spiegel. 1999b. "The Cult of Saint Denis and Capetian Kingship." in Gabrielle M. Spiegel. *The Past as Text. The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*. Johns Hopkins University Press: 138–162.

209 Steinar Imsen. 2012b. "Erkebiskop Eystein som politiker." in *Eystein Erlendsson- Erkebiskop, politiker og kirkebygger*. Nidaros Domkirkes Restaureringsarbeider: 11–23; Gunnes 1996, 99–231; Alexander Bugge. 1916. "Kirke og Stat i Norge 1152–1164." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 3, Universitetsforlaget: 169–212; Bagge 2003a, 51–79.

foundation of the archdiocese in 1152/53, there was a conscious strategy on the part of archbishops to centralize efforts to elaborate and celebrate royal ideology in Nidaros.

The parallel with the Benedictine Abbey of St-Denis and its relationship with the Capetian monarchy have been repeatedly emphasized in the scholarship.²¹⁰ It is true that both the Norwegian Cathedral and the Parisian abbey monopolized several central elements of royal celebration and ideological legitimization, making them unique centres of royal communication. We will examine whether this analogy was purely incidental or the result of a conscious policy by the Norwegian archbishops of the 12th century to reproduce the model of St-Denis on Norwegian ground.

In the immediate aftermath of the foundation of the archiepiscopal province in 1153, Nidaros developed into a dynamic and major cult center under the leadership of its archbishops. The developing cult of St Olav also placed the Cathedral on the map of Christian Europe, attracting growing contingents of pilgrims. The new status of Nidaros was symbolized materially in the reconstruction of the church. Eystein took the lead in the construction of a cathedral worthy of a metropolitan see, whose models included Lincoln Cathedral in England and perhaps also St-Denis in France. The cathedral was built upon an earlier church, Christ Church, probably built under King Olav Kyrre. In the early 1160s, Eystein started the construction of the transept and the sacristy. He also presided over the building of the octagonal choir, which was dedicated to the cult of St Olav, whose relics were to lie in its center. Finally, Eystein also was responsible for the construction in stone of the residence of the archbishop, the economic center of the see and of its leadership.²¹¹

As we have seen, after 1153 Nidaros also rapidly evolved into an active and lively intellectual milieu, unmatched by any other clerical or lay institutions in the country. Around the 1170s, besides the history writing which we will come back to, a new liturgy centred on the saint, the *Office of St Olav*, was compiled, probably upon the archbishop's initiative. Eystein himself is said to have been the author of the *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*.²¹² Eystein also engaged in major legislative activity as well granting the Church its first provincial statute

210 Erik Vandvik. 1961. *Erkebiskop Eystein som politiker*. Nidaros Domkirkes Restaureringsarbeider ved 800-årsminnet for vigselen av Johanneskapellet: 13ff; Bugge 1916, 209–211; Schreiner 1946, 89–90; Vandvik 1962, 61–64.

211 Ekroll 2006, 7–30.

212 Lars B. Mortensen. 2000c. "Olav den helliges mirakler i det 12. årh.: streng tekstkontrol eller fri fabuleringen?" in Ekrem, Inger et al. (red.) *Olavslegenden og den latinske historieskrivning I 1100-tallets Norge*. Museum Tusculanums Forlag: 101.

(*canones Nidrosiensis*) and making Nidaros the Norwegian centre for Canon law in Norway in the 12th century.²¹³

Promoting Nidaros a Center of Rituals of Royal Succession

The archbishops of Nidaros also worked for their seat to become the privileged locus of the ritualistic legitimization of Norwegian kingship in the 12th century. Above we have seen the efforts of the Norwegian clergy to first replace, and then appropriate the ritual of *konungstekja*. The *Law of Royal Succession* of 1163 attempted to replace popular acclamation at the *þing* by an election in Nidaros and a public hailing of the new sovereign on the King's Chair in Nidaros Cathedral. However, the Law of 1163 was never applied and as far as we know no ritual in the precinct of the Nidaros cathedral was ever organized. The king-taking ritual survived and the introduction of relics, in particular those of St Olav, not only consolidated clerical control over the ritual but transformed Nidaros and the *Eyraping* into the ritual's most important locus. The centralizing of rituals of succession of kingship to the metropolitan seat also included royal coronations.

Promoting Nidaros Cathedral as a Coronation Church

The crowning of King Magnus Erlingsson in 1163 was a decisive step for the Church in its attempt to gain control over the Norwegian kingship. In connecting the ceremony to Nidaros Cathedral, the archbishop strengthened this link to the head of the Norwegian Church. The documents issued in the aftermath of the crowning ceremony reveal his ambition.

It appears that the crowning ceremony took place in Christ Church in Bergen mainly because of a combination of circumstances rather than as a result of long-lasting reflection.²¹⁴ The general political situation was critical for Erling and Eystein and may have hastened the decision to organise the ceremony rapidly; indeed, until late in winter 1163, Erling's party still had to face the competition of King Sigurd Markusfostre and his partisans. Furthermore, in the summer of 1163, Bergen hosted an episcopal synod that gathered several

²¹³ Iversen 2011.

²¹⁴ Gunnes assumes that the coronation ceremony was planned in advance, probably already in summer 1162. Still according to him, Eystein probably took contact with the papacy at that time and required the sending of a papal legate to perform the coronation. Nevertheless Stephanus' presence in Bergen in 1164 remains unclear. According to Snorri, it was a coincidence. Indeed, there are many good explanations for the presence of a papal legate in Scandinavia: the establishing of the Episcopal province of Uppsala in Sweden or in mission for the papacy to acknowledge Alexander III. Gunnes 1996, 89–97.

bishops and which provided an excellent and necessary setting for a consecration. In particular, the presence of Stephanus, a papal legate, was too exceptional an occasion not to urge a ceremony.²¹⁵

The choice of Bergen was a momentary setback to Eystein's ambitions to elevate Nidaros as the privileged place for royal consecrations. However, he was to quickly regain initiative. With the *Law of Royal Succession* of 1163, which the archbishop most probably drafted, he set out the role to be played by Nidaros in all future royal elections.²¹⁶ In the stipulation regarding the election of the king in cases where the principle of direct descent could not be met, the law imposed the automatic summoning of the elite to Nidaros in order to elect the new king.

In addition, the law emphasized the role of Nidaros as the centre for royal coronations by stipulating that "and there shall the crown of the king who fell be offered for his soul, and it shall be hang there forever in the honour for God and the holy Olav."²¹⁷ The same exigency is repeated in a letter of privileges where the king promises to offer "the royal crown, both mine, which I offer to the holy altar, and that of all my successors, shall be given to this church."²¹⁸ It was thus the intention of the archbishop that the royal crown and probably the whole set of regalia would be housed in the Cathedral. The dedication of the crown to Nidaros must be interpreted as Eystein's attempt to establish an indissoluble tie between royal succession and the head of the archiepiscopal province.

Still, the presence of regalia did not automatically mean that Norwegian kings had to be crowned in Nidaros. The example of St-Denis illustrates this. The Parisian abbey housed the regalia of the French kings, but they were crowned in Reims.²¹⁹ But while the presence of coronation regalia was not a guarantee for a church to host the coronation ceremony, the presence of elections and of a ritual of acclamation (King's Chair) were. Capetian coronations often occurred in connection with episcopal synods or other clerical assemblies, which gave their approval to the new king; and that in spite of the hereditary character of royal succession.²²⁰ Since Nidaros combined both the

215 Helle 1972, 118–123.

216 Tobiassen 1964, 189–191.

217 *se þar ofrað korona konongs. þess er þa er fra fallen firi sal hans. oc hange þar eilíflega guði til dyrðar oc hinum Helga Olave kononge* (NgL, I, 3).

218 *regale diadema, et meum, quod hodierna die sancto altari in confinacionem [...] et omnium mihi succedencium presenti delegetur ecclesie* (Ibid.)

219 Gabrielle M. Spiegel. 1978. *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A survey*. Brookline, Mass. And Leyden Classical Folia Editions: 11–37.

220 Guillot 2003, 39–43.

possession of regalia and the election of the king, very little stood in the way of the cathedral being used as coronation church.

Eystein's ambition to make Nidaros the stronghold of clerical domination over the Norwegian kingship is also illustrated in the letter of privileges written by the archbishop between 1163 and 1177. The letter grants the Cathedral extensive jurisdiction and economic rights, which aimed specifically to bolster the archbishopric's economy.²²¹ The most important grant however remains King Magnus's donation of his entire realm to St Olav: *Glorioso martyri regi Olao intergraliter speciali deuocione [...] regnum assigno Norwegie*.²²² By this very donation, the realm was considered as a fiefdom in which the king became St Olav's vassal. Although the disposition established a general and symbolic subordination of the kingship to the Church, it ascribed the cult of St Olav and by way of consequence the Cathedral of Nidaros a central place in this relationship. Bagge has argued that the donation had limited political consequences in practice.²²³ To some extent this may be true, but the grant held great significance for ideology and communication...and ultimately for the game of power.

An Early Coronation Ceremony in Nidaros?

In light of these documents, the suggestion made by scholars that King Magnus Erlingsson could have been crowned king on another occasion in Nidaros takes a new dimension. In itself the custom to be crowned twice was not unusual. For instance, Capetian kings were crowned during their father's lifetime and again after his death.²²⁴ Once more we can turn to the letter of privileges to the church. Although the document is not dated, it has been commonly assumed that it was written after the coronation as a reward for the church (1163–1177).²²⁵ In contrast, Eirik Vandvik has argued that this document was written before the crowning ceremony in summer 1163. He contends that the granting of privileges to the Church before coronations was a usual practice, which we certainly find for most realms of medieval Europe.²²⁶ It was also

221 These rights concerned toll taxes on a ship from Iceland and the right to send 30 ballast of meal to Iceland each year; the right to perceive the heritage of foreign clerks. Some dispositions did not specifically concern Nidaros, but all bishoprics of Norway. This is the assessment by the king that he and the members of his retinue will pay the tithe to the Church.

222 *NgL*, I, 443.

223 Bagge 2003a, 65.

224 Guillot 2003, 7–52.

225 Tobiassen 1964, 181–273.

226 Vandvik 1961, 12–13.

something of a logical practice; the Church wanted to secure guarantees before executing a definite and irreversible ceremony. Later coronations in Norway also show that the Church systematically bargained for privileges before consenting to perform the ceremony.²²⁷

The letter refers to a rite performed in Nidaros a few months before the coronation in Bergen, at which Magnus received his confirmation and was crowned by Archbishop Eystein: "We have received the authority and the crown of this realm from God's hands under the invocation of the Holy Spirit through the laying of your hands, venerable father Eystein."²²⁸ Later the document refers to King Magnus's donation of his realm to St Olav on the holy day of resurrection, that is, Easter.²²⁹ Both the reference to Easter and the laying-on of hands have lead Vandvik to argue that the letter refers to Magnus's confirmation. According to the Christian law of the *Frostaping*, everybody had to receive the communion during the first Easter celebration after reaching the age of seven. It so happens that the young Magnus was seven precisely in 1163. This has led Vandvik to conclude that Magnus must have received this consecration at Easter 1163.

More importantly for us, many elements point to the presence of a royal crown in Nidaros on that occasion. As we noted, it is also mentioned that Magnus received a crown, *diadema*, from Eystein. Later in the text, Magnus declares that he offers the royal crown, *regale diadema*, to the *sacro altari in confinacionem*, "the shrine of the sacred altar."²³⁰ If we bear in mind that Magnus in this same letter became the vassal of St Olav, it seems natural to identify this shrine with St Olav's and assume that Magnus's confirmation took place in Nidaros Cathedral.

The Parisian Connection: Nidaros, a New St-Denis?

In the preceding pages we have on several occasions drawn parallels with France. This was no coincidence. Indeed, many elements suggest that the archbishops of Nidaros, and Eystein in particular, had Paris and more specifically the Abbey of St-Denis as the model for the development of Nidaros

227 In 1247, the bishops pressed the papal legate to obtain from King Hákon to repeat Magnus Erlingsson's oath, which was highly favorable to the Church. In 1280, harsh discussions between the archbishop and the Barons about the privileges given by King Magnus Lawmender to the Church preceded the coronation of King Eirik.

228 *dominatum et diadema regni huius inuocato spiritu sancto vestre manus impositione reuerende pater Augustine* (NgL, I, 443).

229 *Ibid.*

230 NgL, I, 443.

Cathedral, in particular for its role in the communication system of the Norwegian kingship.

First, there is strong evidence of an intimate cultural connection between the archbishops of Nidaros and the ecclesiastic milieu in Paris. In the 12th and 13th century, the archbishops of Nidaros cultivated permanent ties with the Abbey of St-Victor in Paris.²³¹ Several high-ranking clerics from the Norwegian Church visited or studied in this institution. In a letter from Roger Abbot of St Euverte, a sister abbey of St-Victor, written between 1161 and 1168, an *archiepiscopus Norvegiae* is mentioned to have stayed at the Parisian monastery.²³² This was without any doubt Archbishop Eystein Erlendsson, who was travelling to or from Rome to receive his *pallium* (1157–1188). While it is unclear whether Eystein studied in Paris or not – although many elements suggest it²³³ – later archbishops of Nidaros had studied in the abbey: Eirik Ivarsson (1189–1205) and Tore Gudmundsson (1206–1214). Tore, bishop of Hamar (1189/90–96) and Bishop Torlak of Skálholt in Iceland (1175–1193) also studied in Paris.²³⁴ These ties were strong and highly important for the Norwegians, who secured them by making regular and significant donations to St-Victor. In return, St-Victor was one of the few places on the continent which commemorated St Olav.²³⁵ Finally, in his history of the Norwegian kings dedicated to Archbishop Eystein, Theodoricus Monachus quotes the works of Hugues of St Victor on several occasions.²³⁶

We mentioned the works of Eystein in the making of a liturgy of St Olav. Many elements in the *Office of St Olav*, which was created during the second half of the 12th century, bear witness to the strong influence of the Parisian religious milieu. The famous hymn from the Olav-sequence, *Lux illuxit laetabunda*, was based on a chant sung at the convent of St-Victor.²³⁷ The influence of St-Victor, which was strong throughout Scandinavia and the British Isles, was further evident in Eystein's founding of the Augustinian monastery of

231 About the abbey, see Jean Longère (ed.) 1991. *L'abbaye parisienne de Saint-Victor au moyen âge. Communications présentées au XIII^e Colloque d'humanisme médiéval de Paris (1986–1988)*. Turnhout: Brepols.

232 See Latin manuscripts, 14368, fol. 909 from the French national Library.

233 Gunnes 1996, 30–40.

234 A.O. Johnsen. 1951. "Les relations intellectuelles entre la France et la Norvège (1150–1214)." *Le Moyen Age*: 267.

235 Gunnes 1996, 85–89.

236 *Historia*, Prologue.

237 Hankeln 2012, 146–149; S.E. Eggen. 1968. *The Sequences of the Archbishopric of Niðaros*. Copenhagen: 219–221.

Elgeseter in 1183.²³⁸ More remarkably, it has been mentioned that the *Office* borrowed some parts from a melody in honour of St Dionysius, the patron saint of the eponymous Parisian abbey.²³⁹

The Letter of Privileges and the Donation of Charlemagne

It is clear that Eystein built his church and its functioning with St-Victor in mind. Eystein's activities also concerned his maneuver to strengthen his ascendancy over the Norwegian kings. Did he also find inspiration for this in Paris? The first striking aspect is that both St-Denis and Nidaros functioned as centers of royal historiography for the Capetian and Norwegian kings respectively. Ever since Abbot Suger's *Vita Ludovici* and the compilation of chronicles in the early 12th century, the writing of official histories was centered in St-Denis.²⁴⁰ Until the 1180s, the Norwegian church and its Cathedral also monopolized the field of written legitimization. The two royal genealogies *Historia Norwegie* (1150–1175) and the *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* (c. 1180) were written in close connection with the archiepiscopal seat. Both works, though with different degrees of certainty, were possibly written by (*HN*) or for Archbishop Eystein (*Historia*). *Ágrip* cannot be directly associated with the Nidaros milieu, but was certainly strongly influenced by its literary production.²⁴¹ The commissioning of histories, which is certainly attested for *HN* and possibly for *Historia*, must be interpreted as a strategy, like that of its Parisian counterpart, to elevate the Cathedral as the fountainhead of written histories of the Norwegian kings.

Nidaros's connection with St-Denis is most obvious in the dedication of the Capetian kings to St Dionysius and in the housing of the regalia. In the letter of privileges, we have seen that King Magnus Erlingsson declared that he himself held his kingdom in fief from St Olav:

*Deo manque in hac die gloriose resurrectionis me cum regno in perpetuum et glorioso martyri regi Olauo integraliter speciali deuocione secundo post dominum regnum assigno Norwegie, et huic regno, quantum deo placuerit, velut eiusdem gloriosi martyris possessione hereditari sub eius dominio tamquam suus vicarius et ab eo tenens presidebo*²⁴²

238 O. Lunde. 1977. *Trondheims Fortid i Bygrunnen. Middelalderbyens topografi på grunnlag av det arkeologiske materialet inntil 1970*. Trondheim: Adresseavisens Forlag: 145–148.

239 Roman Hankeln. 2012. "Eysteins liturgi og dens europeiske musikk." in *Eystein Erlendsson- Erkebiskop, politiker og kirkebygger*. NIDAROS Domkirkes restaureringsarbeider: 139–140.

240 Spiegel 1999b, 138–162.

241 "Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sogum," by Torfinn Tobiasen. *KLNM* Vol. 1: 60.

242 *NgL* I, 443.

In the same document, the king offers his crown and the crown of all his successors to the altar of the Cathedral,

*Ut post vocacionem meam regale diadema et meum, quod hodierna die sacro altari in confinacionem offero, et omnium mihi succedencium presenti delegetur ecclesie*²⁴³

As we have seen earlier, the *Law of Royal Succession* of 1163 also ties the royal crown to Nidaros and St Olav.

And there [Nidaros] the crown of the fallen king shall sacrifice for his soul, and it shall lay there for ever in honour for God and the Saint King Olav.²⁴⁴

The principles of vassalage elaborated in the document were feudal and foreign to 12th-century Norway. Archbishop Eystein must have imported them from abroad. Norwegian scholars have long pointed out the connection with a document from St-Denis containing these two elements and which obviously served as a model for the letter of 1163: the Donation of Charlemagne.²⁴⁵

The writing activity of the monks of St-Denis did not limit itself to historiography. In their scriptorium, the monks also made forgeries. In order to strengthen the dependency of the Capetian monarchy to the abbey, the monks produced a false charter supposedly from 813 known as the Donation of Charlemagne.²⁴⁶ In reality, the document was made around the 1150s at the initiative of Suger (1122–1151) or his successor Odo of Breuil (1151–1162), a well-known counterfeiter.²⁴⁷ According to the charter, the emperor declared that he offered the kingdom of France in fief to St Denis in gratitude for St Denis's help in his war against the pagans, making himself the saint's vassal. As a sign of this

²⁴³ *NgL* I, 443.

²⁴⁴ *oc se þar ofrað korona konongs. þess er þa er fra fallen firi sal hans. oc hange þar eiliflega guði til dyrðar oc hinum Helga Olave kononge.* (*NGL* I, 3).

²⁴⁵ Bugge 1916, 209–211; Schreiner 1946, 89–90; Vandvik 1962, 61–64.

²⁴⁶ *DK*, nr. 286: 428–430.

²⁴⁷ “Holy lord Denis these insignia and regalia of the kingdom of France, I freely abandon to you. This is so that you enjoy them as a sovereign, that you hold and possess the power. As a sign of this I offer you four Gold bezants.” (Author's translation) R. Barroux. 1958. “L'abbé Suger et la vassalité du Vexin en 1124. La levée de l'oriflamme, la chronique du pseudo-Turpin et la fausse donation de Charlemagne à Saint-Denis de 813.” *Le Moyen Age*: 1–26; C. Van de Kieft. 1958. “Deux diplômes faux de Charlemagne pour Saint-Denis du XI^e siècle.” *Le Moyen Age*: 401–436.

vassalage, Charles placed four bezants of gold on the altar of the holy martyr and requested his successors to do the same.

*Sanctissime domine Dionysi hiis regni Franciae regiis insigniis et ornamentis libenter me spolio, ut deinceps eius regale habeas, teneas atque possideas dominium et in signum rei quatuor modo aureos tibi offero bizancios*²⁴⁸

The forgery also was to be a weapon in the rivalry with Reims Cathedral over which was to be the coronation church of the French monarchy. The words of Charlemagne would prove the ancient nature of the abbey's claims. The donation of regalia by the Capetian kings to St Denis had been a regular, albeit sporadic practice since the 9th century. From Charles III (898–922), the abbey received a golden cap (*faislum*), diadems and a royal crown, and the coronation coat of Hugh Capet. In 1120, King Louis VI offered the crown of Philip I.²⁴⁹ The abbey also held the *oriflamme*, the battle standard of the French kings, which was taken out when the kingdom was in danger. With the donation of Charlemagne, Abbot Suger aimed to institutionalize the practice. The charter states that the Carolingian emperor proclaimed that the kings of France from now on should be crowned at St-Denis and that the abbey should house the *regalia*.

*Prohibemus insuper, ne successors nostril Franciae reges alibi quam in ecclesia saepe fati domni Dionysii sint coronati [...] deposito de capite meo regni diademate et sanctorum martyrum altari*²⁵⁰

Finally, the charter also enhanced the situation of the monastery in general. St-Denis was already a wealthy and influential Benedictine institution, benefiting from exemptions from episcopal jurisdiction. With the Donation, the monks wanted even more. It stated that the abbey was the *caput omnium ecclesiarum regni*, “the head of all the churches in the realm;” its abbots being the sole persons authorized to elect bishops and abbots in France.²⁵¹

The Donation of Charlemagne was thus meant to raise St-Denis to the supreme religious institution, set over both the French church and kingship. These aims pleased Eystein, who probably heard of them either when he was

248 DK, t. I, n° 286: 429.

249 A. Erlande-Brandenburg, 1975, *Le Roi est mort. Etude sur les funérailles, les sépultures et les tombeaux des rois de France jusqu'à la fin du XIIIe siècle*. Genève: Droz: 85.

250 DK, t. I, n° 286: 429.

251 DK, t. I, n° 286: 429.

an engaged student in the 1150s or later during his visit in 1161. Nidaros was already the head of the Norwegian province and had almost no rivals on the ecclesiastical scene. Control over the Norwegian kingship however was yet to be completed. In his policy of establishing strong links which would forever link the destiny of Nidaros and the Norwegian monarchy, Archbishop Eystein transferred the vassalage of the king to St Dionysius from St-Denis to Norway. The Norwegian letter of privileges corresponds in every manner to its French model: the royal dependency on the saint and the gift of the crown.

...and it came to Nothing

Ironically, the comparison also holds true when it comes to the failure of these attempts. As we know, Nidaros never managed to replace Christ Church in Bergen as the privileged place for royal consecrations. Although Nidaros failed to become the coronation church, the archbishop remained the unchallenged officiator for almost all crowning. Eystein and his successors could probably live with that, just like their Dionysian counterparts who despite their constant efforts never managed to supplant Reims as the coronation church. Nidaros also never was to house the regalia, which again seem to have resided in Bergen. However, the report in *Sverris saga* about the seizure of Magnus' regalia in Bergen 1177 is the last mention of them. The regalia then disappear from the records and in 1247 King Håkon the Old needed to order a new set of crowns from England for his coronation. Nidaros also never became a royal necropolis. Magnus Erlingsson himself was buried in Christ Church in Bergen. Finally, the tradition of history-writing failed to develop over the next century. Instead, it was the royal court that became the site for the drafting of royal biographies in the 13th century. Even the role of *Eyrapping* in the election of kings would be challenged by the 13th century kings (see III, 7).

Why did the plan fail? First, the internal situation undermined the realization of Eystein's plan. At the turn of the 1180s the civil war erupted more violently than ever and threw the country into political chaos. The death of Magnus Erlingsson in 1184 deprived the Church of its champion, forcing the archbishop to take up the fight against Sverre. The relationship between the Church and the kingship thus deteriorated. Sverre's decision to be crowned in Bergen not only aimed to strengthen a royal continuity with earlier rulers, but it also can be interpreted as a move to undermine the authority of the king's fiercest enemy, the archbishop of Nidaros. We can hardly blame Eystein for his failure. Indeed, no other archiepiscopal seats in the North were ever able to elevate themselves to privileged sites for royal coronations in the High Middle Ages. The archbishop's seat of Uppsala in Sweden also claimed this prerogative but had to share it with Stockholm. The same can be said of Denmark, where

the Danish rulers alternatively chose Lund, Schleswig, and Viborg. We cannot discern the establishing of a royal necropolis *per se* in these countries either.²⁵²

Ultimately it appears that the success and the failure of Nidaros as a center for royal communication rested on one element. The impressive and swift expansion of the Norwegian clergy in general and of the archiepiscopal seat of Nidaros in particular in the 12th century was the work of one man: Archbishop Eystein. His energy, courage and intelligence were the pillars on which Nidaros was built. His commitment to reform was largely responsible for the persistent economical and jurisdictional strengthening of the Norwegian Church. His education and ambition made him the sole architect of the cultural and political ascendancy the Church exerted on the kingship in the third quarter of the 12th century. His death in 1188 was a fatal blow to the Nidaros and one from which it would never fully recover. His successors failed to further his achievements. Eirikr was confronted with the arduous task of dealing with King Sverre: the confrontation prevented Nidaros and the Church from asserting their role in royal communication.

In the first sentences of his chapter dedicated to “The lineage of kings,” the author of *Historia Norwegie* evokes the region of the Trøndelag, of which Nidaros was the main town, as *patria principalis est in Norwegia*, the chief law province of Norway.²⁵³ About 40–60 years later in the 1220s, the Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson termed Nidaros *mestr styrkr landsins*, the place where “the strength of the country lay.”²⁵⁴ It thus seems that the town of the archbishop held a preeminent place in the minds of the Northern literary community. It is indisputable that the town and its cathedral were a major center for royal communication in the 12th century, and we must assume that this was the result of a strategy to make Nidaros a ‘factory’ of kings.

5 Conclusion

As with the greatest Western European monarchies, the development of royal communication in Norway in the second half of the 12th century emerged in close association with the Church.²⁵⁵ The foundation of the archiepiscopal see of Nidaros in 1152/53 was pivotal in this respect. In their strategy to consolidate the newly established Norwegian Church, the archbishops of Nidaros soon developed a rich legitimizing ideology centered on the cult of St Olav that

²⁵² Hoffmann 1990, 131–142.

²⁵³ *HN*, Ch. IX.

²⁵⁴ *HG*, Ch. 15.

²⁵⁵ Genêt 2007, 381–418; Genet 1997, 17–18.

enhanced the political and religious authority of Nidaros Cathedral. Under the leadership of the archbishops, a liturgy proper to the saint developed and a cathedral arose, and from the scriptorium of Nidaros and indeed the whole church province came genealogical histories of kings centered on the king St Olav, emphasizing the connection between Nidaros and the Christianization of the kingdom.

Indeed, part of this strengthening of Nidaros's economic and political basis was achieved through a closer association with the kingship. The context of civil war and the competition for royal power resulted in a political alliance between the Church and the Norwegian king Magnus Erlingsson. The commonality of interest of the two institutions was foundational in the making of royal communication. Yet, beyond providing collateral political benefits, the alliance clearly was asymmetrical in terms of communication.

The crowning of Magnus Erlingsson, though for the first time it ascribed the king a divine legitimacy, never lastingly secured his authority and indeed Magnus was to die by a competitor's sword in 1184. By contrast, the ceremony inaugurated the power of the Norwegian Church over the ritualistic communication of royal legitimacy. Under the aegis of the archbishops, the Norwegian kingship post-1163 was to rely on imported Christian rituals and ideology for the expression of power, which escaped royal control and consolidated the decisive intercession of the clergy. The clergy's hold on rituals of succession is also conspicuous in the appropriation of traditional rituals (*konungstekja*) through the introduction of religious liturgy (processions, translation of relics) and in the maximization of clerical performance (ordeals).

Yet the clearest expression of clerical dominance over communication in 12th century Norway remains the Church's monopoly over the written word. Ecclesiastical literary expertise placed administrative literacy, correspondence with foreign kings, law-making and historical propaganda entirely in the hands of the Church. The Norwegian synoptics clearly illustrate the appropriation of the past by the clergy. They offer an ecclesiastical view of kingship and made the written word less a tool for the consolidation of royal authority than for Nidaros's political ambitions. Nevertheless, the historiographical production of the Church did affect the Norwegian kings indirectly. The histories of kings were structured around the figure of St Olav, king and martyr, and did convey important principles that sustained the legitimacy of the Norwegian kings in their realm. Yet, if the king and his entourage were aware how decisive historical texts were for the legitimizing of royal authority, they did not take the initiative in any writing. We have no evidence of royal patronage under Magnus Erlingsson. Nothing suggests the existence of works dedicated to the king either. Apparently the task was entirely given over to the Church.

Finally, as illustrated by the ritual of *konungstekja* and the writing of royal genealogies, clerical domination over the means of communication is revealed through control over the *loci* of communication production. The coronation church established itself as the matrix of divine kingship. The appropriation of *konungstekja* was realized in translating the ritual to the consecrated space of the Nidaros Cathedral or in the sacralizing of the profane ritualistic space of the *þing*. The ecclesiastical monopoly on writing conferred the scriptoria of bishops and abbots firm control – unmatched by the king – over written production. As a culmination of this control of space, the Norwegian clergy sought to develop a communication center in Nidaros concentrating every major ritualistic and written means of royal legitimization, based on the model of Western European centers like the Benedictine Abbey of St-Denis.

This success was to have major long-term consequences, as the Church's communication system established the premises for the development of a royal communication system in the following century. It defined a ritualistic framework composed of rituals and ceremonies of succession (coronation, *konungstekja*), and trials by ordeal, which were to remain central in the Norwegian monarchy's visual expression of power throughout the High Middle Ages. The Church introduced a centralized model for ritual location that replaced the repetition and dispersion of rituals, paving the way for the creation of new ritual centers for royal celebrations (crownings, royal burials and marriages). The development of a Latin written culture, though appealing only to a literate and clerical minority, still was to impose the written word as the privileged means for legitimizing power for King Magnus Erlingsson's successors. Last but not least, it established the Norwegian bishops as decisive actors to whom Norwegian kings had to relate for their communication in the following century.

The Church's extensive control over the means of ritualistic and written communication conferred great political power over the kingship on the Norwegian bishops. At a time of political instability, the Norwegian bishops held the keys to royal legitimization, a position which they actively used in the Church's and the clergy's interest. Under the reign of Magnus Erlingsson, the commonality of interest of the kingship and the Church secured this asymmetric relationship in communication. However, the challenging of Magnus's power by a new competitor, Sverre, was to not only greatly alter the relationship between the crown and the Church, but also revise the balance of power in the communication of the Norwegian kingship.

King Sverre and the Making of Independent Royal Communication

1 Introduction

Traditionally the reign of King Sverre (1177–1202) has been considered as pivotal in the formation of the Norwegian medieval state, although most scholars have difficulties laying their finger on what his contribution consisted of precisely.¹ Indeed, increasingly many scholars regard King Sverre not as a king bringing radical change, but rather as continuing the institutional reforms initiated by his predecessor King Magnus Erlingsson (1163–84).² It thus appears more and more likely that the development of local and central institutions preceded Sverre's reign. The advancement of the royal tax, judicial and military system seems also to have been instigated under Magnus. It is true that the sources describing Sverre's reign dwell for the most part on the king's martial exploits and depict him as conducting state affairs only marginally. His contribution however was far from negligible. As his funerary epitaph testifies, he stood for "the strengthening of justice, the amendment of law."³ If Sverre cannot be considered the original initiator of institutional development of government, he nonetheless remains a central figure in the establishment of the Norwegian kingship as founder of a dynasty that would last until the death of King Håkon Magnusson in 1319.

But King Sverre's most decisive and original contribution to the process of state-formation concerned the establishing of a royal communication system. The communication system of kingship was based on a double context: the civil war in general and the struggle against the Church in particular.

The political context was to shape the nascent royal communication's coercive character. The rise of royal communication under King Sverre was based on the king's need to legitimate his authority in public opinion in a context of war. Ever since Sverre had entered the competition for the throne in 1177 he had suffered from a lack of legitimacy. Despite his continuous efforts, his royal

1 Helle 1964, 48–51; Krag, Klaus. 2005. *Sverre. Norges største middelalder konge*. Aschehoug & Co, 9–11; Lunden 1976, 129–132.

2 Bagge 1986, 169 ff; Helle 1964, 49; Lunden 1976, 129–138.

3 SvS, Ch. 182.

descent was never proved or at least never really accepted. This did not prevent him taking the crown once he had defeated the ruling king, Magnus Erlingsson, on the battlefield. Yet there were other wars to win and until his death King Sverre constantly had to face rebellions and revolts. In his struggle for royal legitimacy, King Sverre's communication was similar to his command of his warriors on the battlefield, showing his characteristic personal involvement and initiative. The main source from his reign, *Sverris saga*, depicts him frequently holding speeches on the edge of battles or during victory celebrations, exploiting any opportunity to sway his audience. The different kind of struggle that he led against his enemies – the Church in particular – readily took a propagandistic form, connecting his claims to royal legitimacy to mystifications, forgeries, but also political doctrine and ideology by way of a wide range of media aimed at the broadest possible audience.

The generation of this communication system was closely linked to the Church. First the kingship broke with the ecclesiastic monopoly over the means of legitimacy from the previous period. The struggle against the Church confronted Sverre with a paradox. In counting the Church among his fiercest enemies, King Sverre had to fight an institution that used words as weapons and that could only be vanquished by words. At the same time however, opposition to the Church automatically deprived the kingship of using the institution to lead his ideological struggle. Both the absence of clerical support and the urgent necessity to develop arguments and ideas and spread them throughout society were directly responsible for the emergence of an independent system of royal communication.

The rise of an independent communication system challenged the cultural and ideological monopoly of the Church. This is particularly blatant in the use of written communication: King Sverre inaugurated a tradition of personal royal involvement in the production of political literature. He was the first king to command the production of what was to be the first official biographical text of a Norwegian ruler, *Grýla*. The work only covered a short period of his life, his childhood and struggle against the Norwegian rulers, and was written at the instigation of Sverre himself and with his active participation. But the king demonstrated his qualities as communicator particularly in conducting a campaign of propaganda that culminated in the making of the first political text of medieval Norway, an anti-clerical pamphlet better known as *A speech against the bishops*. In taking the lead in its written communication, the Norwegian kingship initiated a process of emancipation from the Church. However, as we will see, this emancipation was only political and not cultural. Indeed, the written communication of King Sverre largely developed within a framework defined by the Church. Sverre's pioneering activity in the field of

written communication should not blind us to the fact that his communication remained chiefly based on orality and direct interpersonal exchange. King Sverre is widely known for his talent as an orator and performer, probably outshone that of his predecessors, but which remained characteristic of a proto-literate society.

2 *Tala Sverris konungf*:⁴ The King's Speeches

Despite the advancement of literacy in 12th century Norway sketched above, orality remained the main device for communication, not the least for kings.⁵ In the scholarship of state and communication and *a fortiori* of literacy and state-formation, itinerancy and orality tend to be strongly opposed to stationary government and the written word.⁶ Nonetheless, as Suzanne Cawsey shows brilliantly in her study of royal eloquence in Aragon, royal speeches still remained essential tools in literate government.⁷ Norwegian scholarship has paid some attention to royal speeches in 12th and 13th century Norway.⁸ The focus has been directed largely at the content of royal speeches and, more marginally, the staging, gestures and rituals connected to public declamations. These elements constituted a specific context for royal orations which cannot be dissociated from the words spoken. Indeed, royal speeches were a performance integrating not only the speaker, but also the audience, the king's followers and the space where public oration took place.

In this chapter, our focus lies on King Sverre. This is mainly due to the source situation. In *Sverris saga*, we possess a great source of information about the king's oratory performances between 1177 and 1202. While most speeches are by Sverre and provide great insight into his oral and visual communication, the saga also contains several orations by King Magnus Erlingsson and valuable information about Magnus's oratory talents, which will help us to identify the

4 SvS, Ch. 38.

5 Nedkvikne 2004, 15–35; Stephen Brink. 2005. "Verba Volant, Scripta Manent?" in Pernille Hermann (ed.) *Literacy in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian Culture*. University Press of Southern Denmark: 77–135.

6 Guenée 1971, 85–112; Genet 2003, 111–138.

7 Suzanne F. Cawsey. 2002. *Kingship and Propaganda. Royal eloquence and the Crown of Aragon c. 1200–1450*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 160 ff.

8 The topic has not been the object of extensive research, but few studies can be mentioned. Knirk 1981; Hallvard Lie. 1937. *Studier I Heimskringlas stil*. Oslo; Sverre Bagge. 1997. "Oratory and Politics in the Sagas." in Jean-Philippe Genet (ed.) *L'Histoire et les Nouveaux Publics dans l'Europe Médiévale (XIIIe-XVe)*. Publications de la Sorbonne: 215–228; Bagge 1996.

main characteristics of royal oratory communication in the second half of the 12th century.

Eloquence and Charisma: Portraits of Kings

Our consideration of charisma as an essential aspect of royal power in stateless societies owes much to Max Weber. In Weber's sociology of politics and government, charismatic authority constitutes the first of three ideal types of political leadership and domination. Weber viewed charisma as a "power legitimized on the basis of a leader's exceptional personal qualities or the demonstration of extraordinary insight and accomplishment, which inspire loyalty and obedience from followers."⁹ Charismatic authority is thus fundamentally relational, based upon the followers' perceptions and conceptions of the leader's legitimacy to dominate. In Weber's view, the leader's personal qualities must be perceived as exceptional and above normal standards. They could be aesthetical; the leader's physical appearance is perceived as exceptional and vests him with the necessary authority to rule. They also could be spiritual; the leader is believed to be endowed with supernatural and magical capacities.¹⁰

Judging from the saga literature, the kings' personal qualities were important in the eyes of their contemporaries. The intense focus on the figure of the king is conspicuous in the character portrayals of leaders and kings such as King Magnus Erlingsson and his successor, King Sverre. These portraits are brief and enumerate what the author considered the chief traits of the kings' personalities. On two occasions, the sagas' authors have dedicated a whole chapter to the portrait of kings. These chapters usually closely follow the death of the protagonist, but in many instances, the depiction of personal qualities and capabilities also appears within the narrative. Generally, the kings' portraits focus on three different aspects: their main traits of character, their physical appearance and their aptitudes.

The *Sverris saga* dedicates a chapter to the posthumous portrait of King Magnus Erlingsson.

King Magnus was condescending and cheerful, and much after the manner of young men, was fond of drinking bouts and the society of women. He took pleasure in games, and surpassed others in feats of agility. He was a very strong man, generous and liberal in his gifts, eloquent of speech. These qualities made him a favourite with men who were fond of

9 K. Diana, Murray, J.L. and Linden, R. 2000. *Sociology in our time*. Scarborough On: Nelson: 438–439.

10 Max Weber. (1922) 1947. *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Free Press.

pleasure. He was most active in the use of weapons, fond of finery, and ostentatious in dress. In stature he was rather tall, well grown, and muscular, had a slender waist, feet and hands well shaped and comely. His mouth was somewhat ugly in shape, but his other features were handsome.¹¹

The author mainly stresses the way Magnus looked both in stature and in clothing. The description is detailed and critical. It emphasizes both aesthetical qualities and less attractive details.

The portrait of King Sverre in the eponymous saga also emphasizes the king's physique in great detail.

King Sverre was most polished in manner. He was low of stature, stout and strong, broad of face and well featured. His beard was usually trimmed, and his eyes were hazel in colour, set deeply and handsomely. He was calm and thoughtful. [...] He was a seemly chief as he sat in his high-seat grandly dressed; for though his legs were short he sat high in the seat. He never drank strong drink to the injury of his reason, and always ate but one meal a day. King Sverre was valiant and bold, very capable of enduring fatigue and loss of sleep.¹²

The author of the saga lays great emphasis on Sverre's physical traits, his size, strength and endurance. He pays particularly close attention to the king's face, which is described with great precision. The most remarkable feature doubtlessly is the author's consideration of the impression of authority emerging from Sverre. While the portrait points out Sverre's smaller stature and his "short legs," the author underlines that Sverre looked like a chief when he sat on the throne, stressing the fact that Sverre's appearance was inherently connected to his leadership.

11 *Magnus konungr var litillatr oc glaðr. hann var mioc I fið ungra manna. dryckio-maðr mikill. hann var oc kvenna-maðr mikill þotti got at leica oc vera um-fram alla men at fimleic. hann var oc helldr ftercr maðr. ar oc ftiornfamr fñiallr i mali. allra manna var hann oc vapndiarfaztr fcarðz-maðr mikill oc fundr-gerða-maðr at clæðum. helldr hár maðr a vox t oc harðvaxin miðmior limaðr vel oc fagrliga. hann var friðr maðr fionum at oðru en hann var noccot munnliotr (SvS, Ch. 98).*

12 *Sverrir var allra manna bezft latadr. hann var lagr maðr a vox t ok þyckr. fterkr at afli maðr breidleitr ok vel farit andliti nu. optaz fskapat fkegít. raudlituð augun ok lagu faft ok fagrt. hann var kyrlatr ok athuga-famr manna [...] hann var fæmiligr hofþingi þar er hann fat I hafetinu med vegligum bunungi. hann var har i fetinu enn fskammr fotlegrinn alldri drack hann afeinginn dryck sva at hann fpilti firir þat víti fínu. Sverrir konungr mataðíz iafnan éinmællt hann var díarfr ok frækn ok elíu nar-maðr mikill við vof ok voku. (SvS, Ch. 181).*

The physical and aesthetical traits described above clearly stress the importance of presentation and image. A prince was judged not only on his decisions and character. He was also appraised by the way he looked and presented himself. The physical appearance of kings was so intrinsically connected to royal authority that the exposition of the king's dead body was essential to secure a transition of power. When King Sverre defeated Magnus Erlingsson in 1184, he displayed the body of the vanquished king to all his followers in order to force them to recognize both him and the reality of their defeat.¹³

Besides the kings' physical qualities, royal portraits lay great emphasis on their oratory aptitude. Eloquence figures among the principal qualities of kings in saga literature.¹⁴ The author of the *Sverris saga* counts eloquence as a major quality of Magnus Erlingsson: "He was [...] eloquent of speech."¹⁵ During his stay in Konghelle in spring 1184, it is said of Magnus that "he was a good speaker, and his speeches were usually short."¹⁶

King Magnus Erlingsson's enemy and successor, King Sverre, was also considered a good and accomplished speaker, and later kings drew on his orations to enrich their repertoire. For instance, in the *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, King Hákon tells his men a story which his grandfather used to tell.¹⁷

Besides the depiction of his physical qualities and of his appearance, the author of *Sverris saga* praises the oratory talents of Sverre in great detail.

He was most eloquent in speech; his ideas were lofty, his articulation was distinct, and when he spoke, the ring of his voice was so clear that though he did not appear to speak loud, all understood him, even though they were far off.¹⁸

Seldom has an author depicted the characteristics of a king's oratory qualities in such great detail, and it becomes clear that the saga is largely responsible for Sverre's reputation as a great speaker. The portrait is also interesting as it alludes to the reception of his speeches. Sverre's tone appears to have been particularly suited to public declamation.

13 SvS, Ch. 97.

14 Knirk 1981, 14 ff.

15 *fniallr i mali* (SvS, Ch. 98).

16 *hann var vel mali farin oc fcoruliga. optazt fcamtalaðr* (SvS, Ch. 82).

17 HsH, Ch. 229.

18 *var hann malfníallazfr stor-radfr fkyrt ordtakit ok romrúnn sva míkall yfir malinu at þo at hann þætti eigi hatt mæla þa fskilðu allfr þott fiari væri.* (SvS, Ch. 181).

Eloquence however was no royal monopoly in the sense that none apart from kings were praised for it. The saga material shows clearly that it was a general quality shared by leaders. For example, in the *Sverris saga*, a new king pretender, Thorleif Breidskegg, was said “to be so eloquent, and able to speak so persuasively, that no one could be angry with him who heard him speak.”¹⁹ While eloquence was a sign of distinction for the elite, lower members of society could also prove to be good speakers. When King Sverre accused the assembly in the Viken of having elected a king against him, his wrath was cleverly appeased by the speech of a representative for the assembly who “succeeded in pleasing the king greatly with words.”²⁰ Thus, eloquence was probably less a princely prerogative than a necessary quality for anyone involved in political communication.

Royal Speeches and War Propaganda

While all kings and princes are praised for their eloquence, probably not all of them were clever speakers. Still, in a proto-literary society speeches were kings' main means of communication and the chief medium by which they could exert power and authority over society. A speech as a form of communication in spoken language does not simply refer to the use of the spoken word. It designates an act of public performance by one speaker before an audience. The nature of the information transmitted in public orations is twofold: a speech can be used to expose or to persuade. Yet, as Knirk stresses, there is no clear-cut edge between a statement that is necessarily biased because it has been selected and interpreted, and a persuasive discourse based on arguments.²¹ As a result, public speaking is essentially cogent and influential. To quote Robert Halleux, “there is no great distance between informing and forming.”²²

We pointed earlier to the importance of orality in the communication of King Magnus Erlingsson (see 1). The communication of King Sverre largely operated within the same framework. The wealth of detail in his eponymous saga however allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the function of public speeches in the communication of kings. In saga literature, no other work has as many speeches as *Sverris saga*, which numbers around 60 different episodes involving speeches. This profusion reflects the pre-eminence of oral

19 *hann væri sva fíuallr maðr at mali. oc hann kynni sva at mæla at engi maðr matti honom reiðr verða fa er hanf mal heyrði.* (SvS, Ch.116).

20 *för hann svâ orðum um, at konúngi hugnaði vel* (SvS, Ch. 138).

21 Knirk 1981, 11.

22 Halleux 2007, 716.

communication at the turn of the 12th century, both in real practice and the literary tradition.

From 1177 onwards, when Sverre sailed to Norway to claim the throne, his life was a long succession of struggles and battles. Orations in *Sverris saga* illustrate King Sverre's use of speeches as weapons of propaganda in his struggle for power against King Magnus Erlingsson and the different rebellious groups that followed throughout his reign. The first and greatest group of orations contains battle speeches, which were used to achieve military success. But King Sverre did not limit his public declamations to the battlefield. Another, smaller group contains speeches that were held in public assemblies of various kinds and show how Sverre used speeches as devices to convince his audience of the legitimacy of his authority.

Battle Speeches

If we were dealing with the continent, we would say that Sverre spent most of his time on the back of his horse. But in the Norwegian context it would be more correct to say that he was constantly on board his ships, fighting competing kings or rebellions against his authority. Although Sverre is seldom depicted as actually fighting on the battlefield, the saga portrays him as a great commander with remarkable tactical and strategic skills and in particular as a great leader with the ability to get men to follow him. This picture largely stems from the numerous battle speeches Sverre holds in *Sverris saga*. To what extent these reflect reality is questionable. The saga was written long after the events, when the results of the battle were known. Sverre's speeches could have been constructed precisely in order to fit the outcome of battles and thereby to praise Sverre's military qualities. Whether the narrative was true or only intended to impress the reading audience, battle speeches revealed one important aspect of the king: the war leader. In ancient times, the few hours preceding the clash of weapons were propitious times for speeches and military eloquence.²³ Sverre's battle orations were delivered right before battles and aimed at exposing and discussing tactical choices with his men. They also played a decisive role in encouraging his troops to fight well for his cause.

Before the battle of Nordnes in 1181, King Sverre called his followers to exalt the righteousness of their cause which was "God's will, and that of King Olav

23 Xavier Storelli. 2007. "Convaincre pour vaincre: place et fonction des harangues militaires dans l'historiographie anglo-normande (XIe siècle-début du XIIIe siècle)." in Aurell 2007c: 53–80; Philippe Contamine. 1994. "Aperçus sur la propagande de guerre de la fin du XIIe au début du XVe siècle : Les croisades, la guerre de cent ans." in Cammarosano 1994: 5–27.

the Saint.”²⁴ He also vaunted their qualities as a decisive element that could tip the apparently unfavorable scales in their favor.

In the hours preceding the battle of Fimreite in 1184, King Sverre improvised an oration as he saw Magnus’s fleet coming into the fjord. Although pressed for time, the saga says that “he summoned all his men straight-way to land; and when they were come together he began to speak.”²⁵ The themes of the speech were traditional: although odds clearly were against them, Sverre still promised them victory. As the response of his men was ambivalent, he explained to them his plan of attack which would lead to Magnus’ death, and this time he was more convincing.²⁶ In his battle speeches, King Sverre thus used techniques that ranged from the promise of bright prospects and rewards, laudatory arguments, and religious appeals to the careful and patient explanation of his tactical choices.

In addition, Sverre mastered the art of winning the hearts of his men by involving them in his decisions. His battle speeches disclose a sense of complicity between him and his men. On many occasions, the saga reports the audience applauding or shouting its approval and its enthusiasm for the king’s choices and encouragements. Almost every battle speech provided the opportunity for a dialogue in which Sverre regularly asked his men for counsel and advice and was promptly answered by their reactions and comments.²⁷ In 1201, King Sverre and his army were besieged in Tunsberg by the Baglers. He summoned all his men to a council to decide whether they should surrender or not, asking them what was their advice.²⁸

It was the duty of the king’s retainers to assist their lord with advice. In the Law of the Retainers, the *Hirðskrá*, written in the 1270s, it appears clear that dukes, earls and lendmenn were the foremost counselors of the king.²⁹ Indeed, the *Hirðskrá* clearly states that it was a lendman’s right.³⁰ Although the law was built upon earlier traditions, it is impossible to know for sure whether the duty/right to give the king advice was already institutionalized in the 12th century. The saga material lays emphasis solely on the king’s expectation to receive advice from them. Thus in the wake of a confrontation with the Baglers in

24 *Almattigs guðs oc hins helga Olafs konungf* (SvS, Ch. 52).

25 *let konungr þegar calla luðr-fvein sinn oc blafa ollu liðino til landgongo. Oc er allt liðit var af komit fciþunum. þa toc konungr til malf* (SvS, Ch. 88).

26 *Ibid.*

27 Knirk 1991, 104–106; Bagge 1997, 217–218.

28 SvS, Ch. 179.

29 *Hsk*, Ch. 14.

30 *Hsk*, Ch. 19.

Bergen in 1198, when King Sverre addressed his men and urged them to answer his speech, he was met with silence. He then said: “You are not doing me justice by being silent. You ought to grant your King the service of answering his speech, and each man should declare his opinion.”³¹

In some instances, the audience could contradict the king’s choices. In 1178, the Birkibeinars chose to attack Nidaros against the king’s advice. The battle was a disaster and compelled Sverre to flee to the mountains.³² These encounters (the pre-battle council as well as the battle itself) reflected the weakness of Sverre’s authority over his men at this early stage of his power. From a literary perspective, it is quite obvious that this decision was partly meant to explain a military disaster.

Apparently the collusion between the king and his followers thus had its limits. It is also possible that this complicity may have been exaggerated in the saga in order to shape the king’s image as leader. Although years of military combat certainly created strong bonds between Sverre and his men, this collusion may also have been a strategy to gain their complete unquestioning support. For instance, the author of the anticlerical pamphlet *A speech against the bishops*, which most probably was written under Sverre’s supervision, uses the same technique to make the audience identify with the king’s cause (see II, 4).

In the saga, Sverre’s battle speeches are presented as a decisive element in his military success. King Sverre belonged to the tradition of eloquent generals who knew all too well that before winning on the battlefield, they had to win the hearts of their warriors. Sverre’s battle speeches strengthened the bond between the leader and his troops and galvanized their energy. Regardless of how successful these speeches were, they offered a restricted means of communication in terms of their limited audience and their location. However, orations were also a main device for kings to address larger audiences in order to convey powerful political messages.

Kings at *þings*

Sverre and Magnus’s rule and authority as contenders or as ruling kings were constantly challenged and we have almost no significant examples of them practicing “normal” government. Sverre’s speech about drunkenness in Bergen in 1186 probably constitutes an exception and shows us a king

31 *Eigi geri þer nu rett er þer þegit við. þa þionuflu eigi þer at veita konungi yðrum at fvara raðum hanf oc fegia honom hvern sina firir-ætlan. þa fvoruðu þeir oc baðu konung raða* (SvS, Ch. 147).

32 SvS, Ch. 27–28.

attempting to uphold law and order.³³ In the context of the civil war, royal orations at *pings*, though not held on the brink of battles, were still largely connected to military matters, the preparation of military campaign or following a military victory. The military context was also directly reflected in the themes developed in the speeches, such as calling out the levy (*Leiðangr*) or obtaining the loyalty of towns.

Generally speaking, links between war propaganda and political propaganda are strong. The struggle for power between competitors to the throne centered largely on claims of royal legitimacy, and speeches could become the medium for stating and explaining the contenders' arguments.

The need for troops was a recurrent issue for kings. Calling out the levy gave King Sverre the opportunity to receive a confirmation of his authority and legitimacy. Facing the rebellion of the Baglers in the winter of 1197, King Sverre prepared an attack on Oslo. He summoned an assembly and called out the levy from the central regions of Norway, Trondelag, Hålogaland, North and South Mæri, and Raumsdale, asking them to gather the following spring.³⁴ The levy met at the appointed time, but the saga reports problems with discipline. Judging by the speech, the levy seemed to have carried out exactions among farms in the neighborhood. The levy's lack of discipline however seemed to reveal a deeper issue with the recognition of Sverre's royal authority. Sverre summoned a general assembly with the local farmers and his troops and held a speech. The lack of discipline was cautiously but firmly condemned and Sverre promised harsh punishments if disorder did not cease, suggesting that any disregard of his will was to be considered a direct challenge to his authority. Indeed, behind the unruliness of the levies lay their growing skepticism of Sverre's royal legitimacy, which apparently was fuelled by Bishop Nicholas's propaganda. The speech thus touches on Bishop Nicholas's accusation that Sverre was a usurper, which Sverre responds to by calling the bishop a coward and a liar. Nonetheless, Sverre was compelled to demonstrate the validity of his claim by listing his genealogy. This was successful and the audience was convinced, so King Sverre was able to depart for Oslo with the levy.

Military orations on the brink of battles did not need a supplementary dose of drama for the audience to understand the seriousness of the king's words. The frame of the public assemblies was markedly less dramatic, but there too, words were sometimes not enough. The sagas provide examples where the public assembly became the stage of a highly theatrical and elaborate performance.

33 SvS, Ch. 104.

34 SvS, Ch. 133.

The Staging of Royal Speeches

Beyond words, the kings' personal visual performance was also central in the dramatization of orations and a good means of obtaining the assembly's subordination. In 1183 King Magnus sailed to Nidaros and summoned an assembly for the men of Orkdal. Magnus delivered a speech in which he demanded the payment of all the fines and *leiðangr* tax the people of the valley owed him for the last three years.³⁵ The request was harsh and was in itself meant as a punishment, since they had previously paid these fines and taxes to Magnus's enemy, Sverre. In order to force the population to obey, the king concluded his speech with "hard language" and apparently made a demonstrative display of gestures so that "the yeomen imagined for a time that he meant to fall upon them and slay them."³⁶ Obviously impressed, the assembly begged his pardon and decreed the payment of war-tax to the king. King Sverre also proved a talented actor in his speeches. In 1184, before exhorting the people of Bergen to provide him with troops, King Sverre stood up, took a long pause and looked around before slowly starting to speak. The saga reports that Sverre made a similar dramatic pause during the trial of the rebellious Earl of Orkney in 1195. After the earl had spoken and submitted to his lord, he fell on his knees in front of the king, who was sitting on his throne. Sverre then stood up and "looked round and slowly began to speak."³⁷

The preceding examples show that kings sat during the assemblies in order to stand up when it was their time to speak. On these occasions, the kings could be seated on a high seat symbolizing their power and authority. These details of the king sitting on his throne during the assemblies are however reported very seldom in the sagas. Indeed, our written sources usually fail to indicate the presence of furniture or arrangements during the assemblies. Similarly, royal insignia could be expected to be present in such context. King Magnus Erlingsson received his crown and royal insignia in 1163. So did King Sverre in 1194. Unfortunately we have absolutely no reports of or allusions to the kings bearing a royal crown or their coronational vestments in public occasions. Did this reflect reality? Or were our authors reluctant to mention elements that they considered to be superfluous details?

In their public performances, kings could also rely on the assistance of their followers. These had a double function. They could support the king through their active participation in the debates, furnishing arguments. The assembly

35 SvS, Ch. 69.

36 *talaði hann hart oc varþ, oc hugðu bændr þat um rið at hann myndi vilia ganga at þeim oc drepa (Ibid.).*

37 *Eptir þetta stoð upp fialfr konungr: oc litaðiz um lengi oc toc feint til malf oc hof a þa leið (SvS, Ch. 99).*

summoned by the archbishop of Nidaros in 1163 gives a good indication of the role of followers at assemblies. The purpose of this meeting was to request new taxes from the farmers. Despite the fact that the great majority of the people in the Nidaros district were connected with the archbishop by relationship or other connection, the task appears to have been arduous, as Archbishop Eystein needed the help of his “relations and friends, and his own activity” to win the assembly’s accept.³⁸

Followers also provided assistance to the king by the simple “weight” of their number. This was especially the case when the assembly served to enforce decisions which might be met with hostility. When King Magnus summoned an assembly to collect fines from the men of Orkdal as a compensation for their support to Sverre, he was followed by *ollu liði finu*, “all his force.”³⁹ This is an example where words were accompanied with a demonstration of strength. The presence of troops aimed at intimidating the audience at public assemblies.

If battlefields and the forum of popular assemblies constituted an ideal environment for propaganda, the contingencies of war could also transform other environments into communication spaces for Sverre’s propaganda. Sverre’s longest and, according to many scholars, his best speeches are those which he held at his enemies’ burials: those of Earl Erling Skakke (1179), King Magnus Erlingsson (1184) and Archbishop Eystein (1189). There the context of the church or cemetery was exploited by Sverre to draw political benefit from the death of his enemies.

King Sverre, a Vulture Perched on High

Sverre was a skillful war leader. He defeated his most powerful enemies on the battlefield; Erling Skakke was killed at the battle of Kalvskinnet (Nidaros) in 1179 and his son King Magnus was also killed at the battle of Fimreite in 1184. His victories removed his most serious competitors, but in order to fully exploit their benefits, true and insatiable fighter that he was, Sverre had no scruples to use his enemies’ funerals for his political propaganda.

The first to fall was Erling. The *Sverris saga* gives a rather terse account of his funeral:

Earl Erling’s body was borne for interment on the south side of the church, but his burial-place now lies within the church. King Sverre made a speech over the grave.⁴⁰

38 *En við styrk frænda erkibyskups ok vina, en framkvæmd hans sjálfs* (ME, Ch. 16).

39 SvS, Ch. 69.

40 *Lic Erlings Jarls var borit til graptar fyrir funnan kirkiu. en nu er groptr hanf i kirkiu. oc er iarðat var likit. þa talaði Sverrir konungr yfir grepti hanf oc mælti.* (SvS, Ch. 38).

Earl Erling was buried in the church in Nidaros, originally outside the building as he was no king. But his grave must have been fairly close to the church, as the text indicates that the tomb lay within the church's walls after extensions to the building. The funeral's central event was the speech that Sverre held over Erling's grave. The text of the speech is often mentioned as being a remarkable example of Sverre's sense of irony and humor. But both text and the circumstances of the oration also provide a significant illustration of his ability as a communicator. In his oration Sverre picked a bone with his enemies, making fun of the archbishop's promise that those who fought for King Magnus would have their soul entering paradise.⁴¹ Sverre then urged the audience to rejoice to the fact that Erling had by now become a saint! In particular, the speech gave Sverre the opportunity to question the legitimacy of King Magnus as well as to equate the crowning of Magnus Erlingsson with usurpation. Sverre urged the audience to pray for the Earl because he had committed "the great sin of arrogance," which was that "a mere baron caused the title of king to be given to his son; and more than that, collected a force and raised his standard against king's sons, King Hakon and King Eystein, both of whom he deprived of their realm."⁴² In contrast, Sverre repeated his rights to the throne. The tone of the speech must have been quite harsh as the author of the saga makes explicit that once Sverre had finished speaking, "he changed his language, and spoke in the manner then customary at the interment of noble persons."⁴³ Sverre's speech was thus a violent attack not only on Earl Erling, true leader of the kingdom and first enemy of Sverre, but also on Archbishop Eystein, the earl's most prominent supporter, and to a lesser degree on King Magnus. It was an oration used as a weapon of persuasion to undermine his rival's legitimacy and to win skeptics to his cause over to his side.

The death of King Magnus Erlingsson in 1184 was a turning point in the conflict. Sverre was then sole ruler of the kingdom. The event was of such importance for Sverre and his party that it needed to be made known as widely as possible. Immediately after the battle, Sverre sailed to Bergen with the corpse of King Magnus. The arrival of Sverre's fleet in the bay of Bergen was the very first stage of what was meant as a demonstration of force, arranged so as to impress the population and make it clear that the new ruler was now the most

41 *Ibid.*

42 *allar þær synþir er hann [...] oc eincum þat er hann toc sva micla dirfð til ein lendr maðr. at hann let gefa konungf nafn fyrni sinum. en a þat ofan reifti hann flocc oc merki amoti konunga sonum Haconi konungi oc Æysteini konungi oc felldi þa baða fra rikino.* (SvS, Ch. 38).

43 *þa veic hann finni ræðu til þeirar siðvenio sem þar er tið at mæla yfir gofugra manna grepti* (*Ibid.*).

powerful leader in the country. This device apparently worked as the townsmen demonstrated their submission in welcoming him with a procession and bells ringing (see 111, 7).

The burial of Magnus Erlingsson in Christ Church was a particularly good opportunity for Sverre to emphasize his authority. The description of Magnus's burial is richer than Erling's. The author adds more telling details about the staging of the ceremony and the ornamentations.

King Magnus's body was prepared for burial. He was laid in earth at Christ church opposite the chancel, in front of the stone wall on the southern side. King Sverre stood by the grave, and Bishop Pal and all the people from the town. Before the body was enclosed in the stone coffin, King Sverre summoned men to look at it, that they might not afterwards be saying that this Magnus was fighting against him [...] Fair speeches were made over the grave [...] The king himself made a long speech, [...] The burial-place of King Magnus was put in careful order by King Sverre; coverlets were spread over the tombstone, and a railing set up around it.⁴⁴

Besides information about the location of the burial, the text provides a detailed account of the staging of the ceremony. It makes clear that the funeral of King Magnus was a public ceremony. Important dignitaries as well as a crowd of people were present. The staging of the ceremony was marked by two main elements: the exposition of the late king's body and the speeches made during the ceremony. The first information is that the body of King Magnus "was prepared for burial." This most probably refers to how the body was dressed. A later source, the *Hákonar saga*, provides some information relevant here, giving a detailed account of how the body of King Håkon was "prepared" for his own burial: "The body was dressed in his royal dress and with a garland on the head."⁴⁵ The text also indicates that the grave was decked with a precious fabric. The careful preparation of Magnus's body was meant to serve Sverre's political interests. The body of Magnus was shown to the public to force them to recognize Sverre's definitive victory and *de facto* his authority as sole ruler of the kingdom.

44 *Lic Magnus konungf var buit til graptrar. var hann iarðaðr i Criftz-kirkiu utar firir korinum firir framan fteinvegin hinum fyðra megin. Sverrir konungr stoð yfir grepti hanf oc Pall byscup oc oll alpyða manna er i var bönun. [...] Seint ætla ec slicom trva mega þa varo fagrlig ørindi toluð yfir grepti hanf [...] Sverris konungf talaði [...] konungr let vandliga bua um leg Magnus konungf. let gera grindum utan um legfsteininn oc breiða yfir kagur. (SvS, Ch. 97).*

45 *HsH*, Ch. 330.

Many speeches were held, in particular by Sverre who spoke “a long speech” of which only a short excerpt is reported. It seems that the oration was less cynical than the one held for Earl Erling and was also rather disconcerting with regards to the references made to Magnus’s royal legitimacy. In his speech, Sverre’s praise for Magnus know no bounds, hailing him as “one who was kind and loving to his friends and kinsmen,” “the honorable chief in many respects and adorned by kingly descent”!⁴⁶ In total contrast with his previous speech, King Sverre explicitly acknowledged and publically underlined the legitimacy of Magnus’s royal title.

The magnificence of Magnus’s burial and the conciliatory tone of his speech contrasted with Erling Skakke’s funeral. The context had changed and King Sverre’s ambitions had too. The funeral of King Magnus was orchestrated as a peaceful handover of power that sanctioned King Sverre’s accession to the throne. Together with the exposition, the oration has to be interpreted as Sverre’s attempt to put a final and decisive end to the competition for royal power. The mild tone of the speech aimed to appease the hostility of Magnus’s supporters. Sverre could recognize the legitimacy of Magnus’s power now that he was dead and there was no opposition to his rule.

The funerals of Erling Skakke and Magnus Erlingsson were important acts of communication for King Sverre. They bear witness to King Sverre’s pragmatic use of ceremonies for political aims. These burials were those of his most prominent enemies and as public events they were remarkable opportunities for Sverre to strengthen his authority. The exposition of royal bodies illustrates that the staging of ceremonies was actively used for Sverre’s purposes. Speeches also played a fundamental part in what we can call a real “enterprise of political communication.” To some extent they functioned as funeral orations, but they especially worked as a rostrum for Sverre’s political game: the death of his opponents was consciously used to consolidate the legitimacy of his claims.

Great Opportunities: King Sverre’s Own Death and Burial

As we have seen, King Sverre exploited the funerals of his adversaries to his own advantage. In his eyes, they were great opportunities to win over his enemies. Even more remarkable is Sverre’s orchestration of his own death, both his illness and his burial, as a grand demonstration of his royal legitimacy and a blatant disavowal of the clergy.

King Sverre fell ill in Tønsberg in 1202. He sailed to Bergen, where he grew worse. He lay many days on his deathbed and made arrangements for his

46 *hann var goðr oc aft-sæll sinum vinum oc frendum, hann var sœmiligr hofþingi i marga staði oc pryddr með konungligri ætt.* (SvS, Ch. 97).

succession, designating his son Håkon as his sole heir. He also gave clear instructions both for the last stages of his life as well as for his burial. He requested to be seated on his throne after receiving extreme unction. He justified his wish in saying that “if I die here in the high-seat, my friends standing around me, the death and the story of it will be other than Bishop Nikolas Arnason will expect; for he said that I should be smitten down like an ox, and be food for hound and raven.”⁴⁷ He also claimed that dying like this would prove that God was on his side.

This staging was also a way for Sverre to strike back against one of the most damaging measures the Church had taken against him: his excommunication.⁴⁸ For his burial, Sverre demanded that his body be left with the face uncovered, “that my friends and foes may both see if there is any mark on my body of the ban wherewith my foes have cursed and excommunicated me.”⁴⁹ The king’s death was thereby his final maneuver in the conflict with the church. In exposing his body, alive and dead, he could offer a public demonstration that the Norwegian prelate’s worst predictions had not come true and by this make obvious that their accusations were unfounded. The staging of his death was his last act of propaganda, which he personally supervised, aiming to demonstrate his legitimate right to be king.

We do not know whether Sverre also gave instructions for his burial. Again though, it was arranged as an important act of political communication.

King Sverre died at Easter 1202. The abundance of details contrasts with earlier descriptions. This may be due to the fact that King Sverre was the main protagonist of the saga and thereby deserved a more extended treatment. The description is however heavily ideological.

King Sverre’s body was carried down to Christ church with great pomp. The stone wall of the church between the chancel and the south door was opened, and the King’s body laid therein. The wall was then built up, and

47 *vil ek þar bida annat-huort bot edr bana ok mvn þetta a annan veg fara edr til spyríaz enn Nichulas byscup Aarnafon mvn vænta ef ek deyr her i haafætínu ok standi yfir meir vinir mínir enn hann hefir sagt at ek mvnda hogínn nidr fem bu-fmali firi hund ok rafn. (SvS, Ch. 180).*

48 There is much uncertainty around the circumstances of Sverri’s excommunication. From 1194, the papacy threatened Sverri with excommunication if he did not respect the archbishop’s rights. The king’s crowning in summer of the same year must have been a good reason to excommunicate Sverri especially since the bishops who crowned him were excommunicated in October. Gunnes 1971, 269–317.

49 *latid þa fía bædi víní mína ok v-uíní huart þa bírtiz nockut a líkama mínum bann þat er v-uínir mínir hafa bannat meir edr boluat (SvS, Ch. 180).*

a tablet of brass was fixed, on which was engraved in gold letters [Latin] verses to this effect: “Here lies the excellence of kings, the support and pole, the model and pattern of faith, manhood, and honour; the manly strength, shield, and defence of his native land and the inheritance of his fathers; the courage of resolution, the destruction of foes, the honour of Norway, the glory of its people, the strengthening of justice, the amendment of law, the affection of all his followers.” To the wall was fixed a velvet cloth, and on it were his standard, shield, sword and helmet.⁵⁰

The burial of Sverre was a public act of remembrance. The text indicates that the body of Sverre was transported to the church “with great pomp,” that is, escorted by a procession. In contrast with the burial of his predecessors and enemies, it is not reported that speeches were held at Sverre’s grave. The most interesting part of the description concerns the inscription on the metal tablet. It is an epitaph, the primary function of which was to celebrate the King Sverre’s memory. The text was written in Latin. It aimed to communicate to the audience what Sverre was to be remembered for. However, commemoration does not necessarily mean an objective and neutral account of what the defunct individual was or did. On the contrary, the act of remembrance implies a selection of information. Specific elements of the past are enhanced and magnified, whereas others are just “forgotten” or dismissed. Then epitaphs can be used to exalt the life of the dead and serve as instruments for propaganda.⁵¹ The epitaph of King Sverre clearly aimed at more than simply preventing Sverre’s life from falling into oblivion. The inscription is full of praise for the deeds and qualities of King Sverre. First his personal qualities are exalted – faith, manhood and honor – which distinguish him as a role model. The last part of the epitaph is a laudatory description of Sverre as king. Sverre is

50 *Ofan til Krifrz-kirkiu var borit lik Sverris konungs med prydi mikilli vtar frá korínum enn innar frá fudr-dyrum var opnadr steín-vegrínn ok lagit þar i lik konungs latínn aftr sípan vegrin ok feft þar a tabola af eíri ok þar rítad a mder gul-stofum vers þau er þat segía at þar ligi. tign konunga. fíod ok fíolpí mynd ok dæmi truar prydi ok dreíngfkapar. hardr fíkorugleíkr. fíkiol ok hlífð finnar fíofíuriardar ok faudurleífdar. hreyfti hard-ræðinnar. nídran v-vínanna. vegr Noregf dyrd finnar þíodar. eflíng retínda. retíng. laga. afíud allra fínna manna. þar var feft a veginn pell eítt. ok þar hía merki hans ok fíkiolldr hans fuerd ok íalíhufa. (SvS, Ch. 182).*

51 Vincent Debais. 2009. *Message de pierre. La lecture des inscriptions dans la communication médiévale (XIIIe-XIVe siècle)*. Brepols : 353–359 ; from the same author, 2007. “Afficher pour convaincre : la construction et la promotion de la mémoire dans les inscriptions comme instrument de la propagande médiévale.” in Aurell 2007c: 651–702 ; Xavier Dectot. 2009. Les tombeaux des familles royales de la péninsule ibérique au Moyen Âge. Brepols : 257–259.

ascribed most of the topical qualities of kingship. His role as defender of the kingdom and guarantor of peace is exalted. He is the “upholder of justice” and the “amendment of law.” These are the inherent qualities of a king according to the *rex iustus* ideal: the king is the protector of society. He rules through law and justice.

There is however one notable absence among the qualities that traditionally characterize a rightful king. There is no reference to the divine origin of his power, or to the royal duty to protect the Church or to promote the Christian faith. The reference to the late king’s faith is the sole allusion to religion. The toning down of these attributes is in itself not surprising. It reflects Sverre’s troubled relationship within the local clergy and in particular with the bishops. King Sverre had been excommunicated most of his life as a result of his conflict with the Church. The country may also have been placed under the interdict. The excommunication was been annulled during Sverre’s life and he died excommunicated. It was only under the reign of his son that the crown reconciled fully with the Church. For these reasons, the authors of the inscription could hardly emphasize the privileged relationship between the king and God as well as his duties towards the Church. An interesting trait also emerges from the inscription: the emphasis on the king’s heredity. Sverre is described as “the shield of the inheritance of his fathers.” The issue of royal descent was fundamental throughout Sverre’s life as he claimed he was the son of Sigurd Munn. The veracity of his claim was never proven and Sverre’s reign suffered throughout from a clear lack of royal legitimacy. The inscription does not inscribe the reign of Sverre in a royal line but solely in the line of his fathers. This means that Sverre’s royal legitimacy was still a central issue after his death.

In spite of the omissions we have mentioned, the inscription conveyed a favorable image of King Sverre overall. Besides his personal qualities, it exalted his role as law- and peacemaker and dispenser of justice. The epitaph was meant to impress the public and to leave the image of a great king, maybe not by descent, but at least by his achievements.

Besides the internal features of the inscription (the meaning of the text, the language), the external characteristics (the form, the staging, ornamentations) also played a major role in the posthumous promotion of Sverre’s kingship. As several studies in medieval epigraphy have stressed, the value of epigraphic inscriptions and their efficiency as vector of communication lay in the fact that they combined several components: a text, a location and sometimes objects.⁵² The location of the grave provided an important dimension of the

52 Robert Favreau. 1997. *Epigraphie médiévale*. Turnhout; Debais 2009.

inscription. The king was buried within the walls of the church, more precisely, in the southern part where King Magnus Erlingsson had already been buried earlier. To be buried directly within the church walls was the privilege of kings.⁵³ This simple fact shows that Sverre was recognized as king. The grave of Sverre was close to the chancel, which can be seen as the holiest place in the church. This also was a common location for royal burials. The wall on which the tablet was fixed also contributed to the celebration of King Sverre. The saga mentions that the wall was decked with “a velvet cloth” upon which the king’s “standard, shield, sword and helmet” were displayed. These were objects that Sverre had owned. They were war objects that fitted well with his personality and also reflected the nature of his power. King Sverre was a warrior king who spent most of his life fighting against opponents to his rule. To that extent, the exposition of his weapons and armor could simply aim at exalting the warrior.

Yet these objects were probably more than that. They were the very symbols of his kingship. Binski has pointed out the inextricable link between royal burials and coronations, both functioning as a rite of passage and a decisive moment in the transfer of power.⁵⁴ The exposition of regalia in the context of royal burials symbolically expressed the continuity of power. The presence of regalia was a common feature of royal funerals in many lands.⁵⁵ These objects could be let down into the grave together with the body of the king. During the ceremony, the coffin was open and the regalia were exposed to the public. Most often they were removed before the grave was closed. The custom of fixing royal objects directly to the wall was also common in many lands. In Sverre’s case, the standard was the flag he used during battles to indicate his location to his troops. Sverre’s standard is mentioned several times in the *Sverris saga*. Unfortunately we have no description of it, but we know that the standard was called [Sigrfluga] which may indicate that the flag resembled a fly. However, in itself the standard symbolized the king. The shield, the sword and the helmet of Sverre were his weapons in combat. The shield in itself was an object symbolizing protection. This significance is echoed in the epitaph which refers to King Sverre as “shield, and defense of his native land and the inheritance of his fathers.” The shield may also have borne signs, symbols or drawings. Hallvard Trætteberg suggests that a figure of lion, symbol of kingship, may have been popular among Scandinavian kings in the 12th century and for this reason

53 Erlande-Brandenbourg 1975.

54 Paul Binski. 1996. *Medieval Death*. The British Museum Press. 58–63.

55 Erlande-Brandenbourg 1975, 109–123.

could well have been on Sverre's shield.⁵⁶ The helmet is also a war symbol combining several different meanings. As an element of the armor, like the shield, it symbolized protection. It was also a symbol of power which preceded royal crowns and a symbol of peace and justice. The sword was also a common royal attribute which referred to the royal function of protecting society. All these objects stressed the role of King Sverre as protector and defender of society.

Rituals and ceremonies are loaded with ideology and meaning. Royal funerals were ceremonies praising kingship and princely rule. Yet in order to understand their full significance, rituals and ceremonies must not be analyzed in isolation. They operated within a context that ascribed them a new meaning. Rituals and ceremonies were actively integrated within the system of communication of kingship to promote its policies. As the examples of the funerals of Erling Skakke and Magnus Erlingsson show, burials were used by King Sverre to conduct war propaganda. Sverre's own burial is an eminent example of the ceremonies' double meaning. The epitaph written on the tablet, the exposition of regalia, and the very location of the grave, all celebrated kingship in general and Sverre's royal office in particular. Nonetheless, the omissions in the epitaph about the divine character of Sverre's kingship show that Sverre's burial was not free of politics. The epitaph reflected the views of the clergy which, though not unanimously hostile to Sverre, could not simply ignore the gravity of his acts against the Church.

Taking Matters in Hand: The Crowning of King Sverre

Sverre's talents as orator in public meetings at things or during the funerals of his enemies illustrate how the king used public rituals and ceremonies for his own ends. However, there was a ceremony that more than any other could bring King Sverre the legitimacy he was so desperately seeking: the ceremony of coronation and anointment. As we know, royal coronation had only recently been introduced in Norway by the Church. Indeed, it was Sverre's enemy, King Magnus Erlingsson, who had been the first Norwegian ruler to benefit from it in the summer of 1163. King Sverre was also king, but in the old fashion, that is, through acclamation at the popular assemblies in 1177.⁵⁷ He nonetheless had an indirect and inglorious relationship with royal crowning; Sverre was the one who killed the first crowned and anointed king, Magnus, at the battle of Fimreite in 1184. There was nothing here to boast about for a king who himself

56 Hallvard Trætteberg. 1933. "Norges statssymboler inntil 1814." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.), Vol. 29, hefte 8 og 9, Oslo.

57 SvS, Ch. 11.

wished to be king by the grace of God. The Norwegian clergy was indeed fiercely opposed to Sverre's rule and *a fortiori* to providing him the divine sanction of crowning and anointment. But Sverre took the matters into his own hands and, under very particular circumstances, obtained the support and assistance of the Norwegian clergy to perform his coronation. In the summer of 1194, King Sverre was crowned in Christ Church in Bergen.⁵⁸ The event was an important move for Sverre in his struggle against his opponents. On the domestic side, it harnessed the local clergy, which stood behind his coronation completely. On the foreign side, it faced the papacy with a *fait accompli* which opened up the possibility of later recognition.

The overall context of the propaganda campaign is relatively well-documented from *Sverris saga* and the correspondence between Archbishop Eirik and the papacy. There is however no detailed information about the ceremony itself. The saga only gives a terse description of the ceremony and of the celebrations before and after the coronation. Apparently the event was an international sensation and two English chroniclers, Roger of Hoveden (1174–1201) and William of Newburgh, wrote accounts of Sverre's struggle to be crowned and some information about the staging of the ceremonial.⁵⁹

The crowning was a long-desired event for Sverre. Since his victory over King Magnus Erlingsson in 1184, Sverre had never stopped asking his archbishops to crown him. Yet Eystein (1158/59–1188) never agreed to his request. His successor Archbishop Eirik Ivarsson (1188–1213) also totally opposed to the project. According to the Chronicle of William of Newburgh, Archbishop Eirik's refusal provoked his exile in Denmark (1191–1202): "[Sverre] having abjured the sacred order, and taken in marriage the daughter of the Gaut-king, wished to be solemnly crowned by the archbishop. But he, since he was a great man and not to be induced by prayers or threats to pour sacred ointment on an execrable head was driven by Sverre from his fatherland."⁶⁰ In a letter to Pope Clement III, which he probably wrote shortly after his departure from Norway, Eirik complains about Sverre's incessant demands to be crowned and makes it one of the main motives for their enmity.⁶¹

58 SvS, Ch. 123.

59 CR, 270.

60 *sacro ordine abjurato, et accepta in conjugem filia regis Gotorum, ab archiepiscopo terrae iUius solemniter coronari voluit. Verum ille cum esset yir magnus, et neque precibus neque minamm terroribus flecteretur ut caput execrabile sacra unctione perfunderet, ab eodem patria pulsus est.* (Hra, 230).

61 DN IV, nr. 3.

The circumstances preceding the coronation in 1194 were decisive in the king's move to organize his own coronation himself without the archbishop and the pope's agreement. The systematic refusal of the Norwegian prelates certainly radicalized Sverre's opposition to the Church. Early in the 1190s, King Sverre started a full-scale attack on the "freedoms" of the Church, claiming the right to elect priests and bishops and to judge them at his judicial court. Finally he contested the archbishop's right to hold a retinue of more than thirty men; Eirik had over a hundred!⁶² Like his predecessor, Eirik was forced to go into exile and found refuge with Archbishop Absalon in Lund in 1191. The archbishop did not remain inactive however. In 1193–94 a military offensive was initiated by Eirik with the complicity of Sigurd Erlingsson, the last throne pretender, and Nicholas, Bishop of Oslo. A crucial confrontation at Floravågar in April 1194 resulted in a stunning victory for Sverre.⁶³ An ultimatum meeting was arranged in Easter 1194 with a papal legate in Konghelle who was asked by Sverre to consecrate him. Apparently the legate was ignorant of the king's ban and at first responded favorably. But he was alerted to the conflict with Eirik by some clerics loyal to the archbishop and changed his mind. He requested that the king make peace with the archbishop first. The legate made clear that reconciliation with Eirik was a prerequisite before a coronation could be thought of. Sverre sent him back to Rome *manu militari*.⁶⁴

While the situation with the Church was deadlocked, on the domestic side the king was in a far more favorable position. Following the victory of April 1194 over the rebels of the *Eyjarskeggjar* and the death of Sigurd, King Sverre decided to immediately exploit his military success by organizing his coronation. The consecration however required two things: the approval of the Church and the active participation of the clergy in the ceremonial. As we have seen, archiepiscopal and papal consent were not to be reckoned with. However, until 1196 and the start of the mass exile, many bishops were still loyal to Sverre. Those who still opposed him could be broken. The military victory of Floravågar made this possible. One of the leaders of the rebels had been no other than the Bishop of Oslo, Nicholas. His defeat placed him in an untenable position and Sverre soon confronted him with accusations of treason. The bishop then swore fealty to the king and consented to agree to any of his requests.⁶⁵ In

62 SvS, Ch. 117.

63 SvS, Ch. 120.

64 SvS, Ch. 122.

65 SvS, Ch. 123.

winning Nicholas to his side, King Sverre had broken clerical resistance at home for good.

He immediately called a meeting with the bishops in Bergen. Bishops Tore of Hamar and Nial of Stavanger answered favorably. The *Sverris saga* recounts that a banquet was organized at which the bishops agreed to crown Sverre. During the banquet, King Sverre increased his grip on the clergy in ensuring the election of his own chaplain Martin as Bishop of Bergen, replacing Bishop Pål who had died shortly beforehand. Nicholas apparently agreed to crown Sverre. On 29 June, King Sverre was crowned in Christ Church.⁶⁶ The reasons for choosing Bergen were twofold. The first was to perpetuate the tradition inaugurated by King Magnus Erlingsson in 1163, as suited a king who wished to base his royal consecration on continuity. Secondly, the choice of Bergen was a deliberate slap in the face to the archbishops of Nidaros who had the ambition to elevate their cathedral to the rank of coronation church (see 1, 4). The boycott of Nidaros was meant to weaken the prestige and symbolic authority of its archbishops. The staging of the ceremony is briefly described in *Sverris saga*.

So it came to pass that they consecrated him King of the day of the Apostles Petr and Pal; he then took the crown, and Bishop Nikolas was the chief man at the consecration. The King gave good gifts to all, and they separated with much affection.⁶⁷

Bishop Nicholas officiated as leader of the ceremony. The saga mentions only that Sverre was crowned and consecrated, which must refer his anointment.⁶⁸ Apart from the crown, there is no mention of royal insignia. However, Sverre really did use Magnus's coronation regalia, which he came into possession of during his attack on Bergen in 1181. Apart from the bishops, the *hirð* was also really present at the ceremony. According to Roger of Hoveden, "principes regni," magnates, were also present.⁶⁹ The ceremony itself offered the edifying demonstration of the clergy's loyalty to the king. Indeed, Bishop Nicholas, the

66 SvS, Ch. 123.

67 *oc var þat raðit at þesir byscopar myndo gefa Sverri konungi vigflo oc corona hann. for þat oc fram at þeir vigðu hann til konungf a degi postolana Petri oc Pali. toc hann corona oc var Nicolaf byscup hofuðf-maðr at vigflunni. konungr gaf þeim ollum gopar gíafar oc scilpuz þeir við miclom kærleic (Ibid.).*

68 Martin Blindheim. 1985. "Spor av hersker- og kroningsinsignier i norsk middelalder." in M. Blindheim, P. Gjørder & D. Sæverud (red.) *Kongens Makt og Ære*. Universitets Oldsamling, Oslo: 65.

69 CR, 270.

same who a couple of months earlier had led the rebellion against the king, now officiated in place of the archbishop in the presence of three other bishops. In making the Norwegian clergy actively participate in the crowning, Sverre not only neutralized one of his sternest enemies, but involved it in the legitimization of his authority. This involvement, though truly obtained under menace, alienated the bishops from their archbishop for a time and greatly reduced Eirik's room for maneuver within the realm of Norway.

Once the coronation was performed, clerical support enabled the king to reap the benefits of this victory to consolidate his rule. Now fully backed up by his church, King Sverre could compel the Orcadians to redefine their position with the Norwegian king. Our sources tell nothing about the processions and the possible acclamation of the new king outside the church. But they do tell us about the banquet that followed the ceremony. The saga recounts that "The King gave good gifts to all, and they separated with much affection."⁷⁰ Some elements suggest that Sverre used the crowning festivities to undertake the definitive breaking of the rebellion and restoration of his authority. The Chronicle of Roger of Hoveden provides us with a somewhat more unpleasant account than *Sverris saga*. The English chronicler explains that during the final banquet in the presence of bishops and magnates, King Sverre had the corpse of Sigurd, son of Magnus Erlingsson, be decapitated.⁷¹ This macabre *mise-en-scène* may be the product of the author's morbid imagination. But if it really took place, it could have been a way for Sverre to show his resolution to break the rebellion. A less dramatic interpretation would point to King Sverre using the banquet to strengthen the loyalty of his supporters and debate about breaking any last resistance. Evidence of this is found in the *Sverris saga*, which mentions that in the summer of 1194 King Sverre considered sending a force west to the Orkneys to requite the men of Orkney their treason.⁷² We do not know the exact date of this discussion, but the coronation celebrations certainly provided the best opportunity for Sverre to debate any retribution with his allies. While the military option seemed to not have been chosen then, as Helle suggests, it is plausible that King Sverre discussed the possibility of summoning the Orcadians to his court to answer for their rebellion.⁷³ The fruit of this enterprise was to be reaped a year later in Bergen, when Bjarni, Bishop of the Orkneys, Earl Harald Maddadsson as well as, "all the best men of the Orkneys," came to Bergen to meet the king in order to better defend

⁷⁰ SvS, Ch. 123.

⁷¹ CR, 270.

⁷² SvS, Ch. 124.

⁷³ Helle 1972, 127.

themselves.⁷⁴ At this meeting, Earl Harald Maddadsson renewed his oath of allegiance to the Norwegian king and lost the Shetland to the Norwegian crown.

The whole process – the episcopal election of Martin and the coronation – was contemptible in the view of the Church and it is questionable how much political benefit King Sverre thought this usurpation could bring him. Indeed, shortly after his coronation, the king was excommunicated. Although the saga underlines the intimate involvement of the bishops and in particular that of Nicholas, it is pretty clear that their consent and participation was obtained through menace or compulsion. Unsurprisingly, Pope Celestine excommunicated all the bishops who performed the consecration.⁷⁵ Ultimately these had no other option than to flee from Norway and seek peace with their archbishop.

Sverris saga does not indicate that Sverre exploited his divine legitimacy after 1194. For instance, in a speech in Bergen in 1197, facing unruly troops and a declining authority, King Sverre used many arguments to remind them of his legitimacy: his royal descent and the validity of his claims according to traditional practice.⁷⁶ There is no mention however of the divine origin of his authority implied by the anointment and crowning of 1194. It is true that we only have the word of the author of the *Sverris saga* for this and King Sverre may have exploited his crowning more systematically. Yet later the author of the anticlerical pamphlet *A speech against the bishops* did not use Sverre's divine legitimacy a single time as an argument in his support.

In *The saga of Sigurd, Inge, and Eystein, the sons of Harald*, Snorri tells of the murder of King Eystein Haraldsson in 1157 that *hefir Sverrir konungr ríta látit*, “King Sverre has caused [...] to be written.”⁷⁷ It not clear which work this quotation refers to. Scholars have proposed the lost kings’ saga *Hryggjarstykki* or the *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, but these propositions are rather doubtful.⁷⁸ More improbable however is the existence of a work made by Sverre recounting events from nearly twenty years before he was hailed as king. Snorri’s reference is not completely innocent and reveals King Sverre’s major contribution

74 *allir hinir betztu men af Orcneyiom* (SvS, Ch. 124).

75 The episode is reported in a letter from 1195 from Abbot Æbelholt to the pope (DN VI, nr. 4).

76 SvS, Ch. 133.

77 SH, Ch. 32.

78 Halvdan Koht. 1921. *Innhogg og utsyn i norsk historie*. H. Aschehoug: 175–176.

in establishing a tradition of political and historiographic literature. As we will see, this tradition was a direct product of the local political situation. However it also developed within a general cultural context.

The Nordic regions did not experience any literary renaissance *per se* before the 13th century. However, as Leidulf Melve argues, the last decade of the 12th century must be viewed as a “formative period” which presaged the flourishing of literary activity in the following century.⁷⁹ At the turn of the century we thus witness an increasing production of texts in Norway and in the Norse cultural sphere. This concerned first of all the Olav literature: *Historia de Antiquitate regum Norwagensium* (1177–1188), *Ágrip* (1190), the *oldest saga of saint Olav* (c. 1190), and the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (c. 1190) by the Icelander Odd Snorrason.⁸⁰ The period was particularly decisive in the development of saga literature also: *Orkneyinga saga* (c. 1200), *Færeyinga saga* (1200), the earliest sagas of Icelanders and to some extent the *Böglunga sögur* (1202–1217).⁸¹ These creations must be interpreted as a direct but delayed product of the Western European cultural revival. Due to the slowness of communication in general and in particular of the diffusion of manuscripts, mid-century works and translations of classical works only became widely available in the 1180s and 1190s. Works like the *Decretum* of Gratian (mid-12th century) or Honorius Augustodunensis’s *Elucidarius* (c. 1100) were only made accessible in the Nordic regions in the late 12th century.⁸² This cultural effervescence thus only reached countries like Norway late, but nonetheless stimulated local activity. Due to his education as a priest, King Sverre was better able than many magnates to appreciate the power of the written word. However, while external elements certainly were at play, Sverre’s involvement in the writing of literature was motivated by his own political situation. In Sverre’s hands, the written word was made a weapon of propaganda.

In the following we will examine two aspects of the use of the written word by King Sverre as a means of legitimizing his power. In the first section we will explore Sverre’s autobiographical text known as *Grýla* (1185–1188), which recounts his accession to power in the late 1170s and early 1180s. The second section focuses on his struggle with the Church, which generated a campaign

79 Melve 2001, 138–139.

80 Mortensen & Mundal 2003, 353–384.

81 Jonas Kristjánsson. 2007. *Eddas and Sagas*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag: 147–166, 203–298.

82 An early translation in Old Icelandic is dated from the last decade of the 12th century. Magnus Eiriksson. 1857. “Brudstykker af den islandske Elucidarius.” *Annaler for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, København: 238–308.

of propaganda of letters and speeches. In particular it caused the writing of the first example of political literature in Norway, the anticlerical pamphlet, *A speech against the bishops*.

3 *Grýla*, Political Propaganda in Religious Clothing

Magnus's fatal fall into the waters of Fimreite (1184) was a decisive event in the reign of King Sverre. The king had got rid of the last of his fiercest enemies and was now sole ruler of the kingdom. Yet the death of Magnus did not solve all of Sverre's problems. His legitimacy to the throne was still questioned. In order to fully profit from his victory, Sverre chose to use the written word. What had been gained on the battlefield needed to be secured by proposing a new version of the conflict and a new understanding of its outcome. Through drafting his own biography, the king proposed to ascribe a divine legitimacy to his accession to the throne.

When studying the reign of King Sverre, one cannot avoid his eponymous saga. *Sverris saga* is the sole surviving narrative of King Sverre's reign, but it is first and foremost a remarkable example of the Norwegian kingship's written communication at the end of the 12th century. *Sverris saga* is a biography that narrates Sverre's life from his birth to his death. The work is composed of two parts written at two different dates by two different authors.⁸³ The first part is called *Grýla* and was written in the second half of the 1180s, that is, under King Sverre, by the Icelandic abbot Karl Jónsson and Sverre himself.⁸⁴ The second part, which makes up the main bulk of the saga, was written some 20 years later in the 1210s, but the identity of the author remains unclear. It is usually assumed that Karl took the text with him back to Iceland with the intention of completing it later, which according to several theories he did early in the 13th century after Sverre's death.⁸⁵ During this second redaction, the author probably reworked the whole text, making it difficult to determine the transition between *Grýla* and the new part. The prologue of the saga states that "It tells of certain of his battles, and as the book advances, his strength grows, foreshadowing the greater events."⁸⁶ The nature of these "events" has been subject to

83 For an overview on authorship see Bagge 1996, 15–19. E.N. Brekke. 1958. *Sverre-Sagaens opphav. Tiden og forfatteren*. Oslo: Aschehoug & Co.

84 SvS, prologue.

85 Brekke 1958.

86 *Oc fua fem a liðr bokina vex hanf styrkr. oc fegir fa hinn fami styrkr fyrir hina meiri luti* (SvS, prologue).

much conjecture. The length of *Grýla* has been the object of numerous studies. The supporters of a long *Grýla* have argued that the death of Magnus Erlingsson (1184) definitively was the greatest event of Sverre's reign and is the one the prologue speaks of. Proponents of a short *Grýla* consider the fall of Earl Erling at the battle of Kalvskinnet in 1179 the probable *terminus ante quem*.⁸⁷ However, to a large extent *Grýla* has been interpreted within the broader context of the *Sverris saga* and only seldom as an individual text in its own right.⁸⁸ In the following I will focus exclusively on *Grýla* in the context of 12th century royal communication. I will examine *Grýla* as a distinctive means of communication that was written for a defined purpose and audience and that had a style of its own. *Grýla* was a building block in Sverre's political propaganda that aimed to legitimize his authority by showing that his accession to the throne was part of a divine plan.

It is commonly assumed that *Grýla* was written during Karl's stay in Norway between 1185 and 1188. The eight short chapters from the saga that cover the period say nothing about the circumstances of the redaction.⁸⁹ It appears clear however that during this period, Sverre's power seems to have been sufficiently challenged that he was compelled to justify his accession to the throne, while at the same time sufficiently established that he could choose to do this through an act of literary propaganda.

While victory over Magnus had undoubtedly cleared the way for Sverre's kingship, his authority remained questioned. In the autumn of 1185 a new claimant, Jon Kuflungs, and his eponymous followers filled the vacuum left by King Magnus and challenged Sverre's rule. The rise of the Kuflungs was a serious threat to Sverre. They defeated Sverre's forces several times and at their peak extended their control over the whole southern half of mainland Norway. Apart from their military conquest they also seem to have been supported by large parts of society, notably by a significant number of the clergy.⁹⁰

In his confrontation with Jon, however, Sverre was no longer a simple claimant. His rule, though challenged, was firmly established. According to the saga, after the battle of Fimreite, King Sverre was now sole ruler over all Norway.⁹¹ Yet apart from his important victories, Sverre had no more right to the kingship than other competing throne pretenders such as Jon. In order to gain an advantage over other claimants, Sverre had to rely to the same device as his

87 «Sverris saga», by L. Holm-Olsen, KLN M Vol. XVII, 551–558.

88 An eloquent exception finds in Krag 2005.

89 SvS, Ch. 99–107.

90 Krag 2005, 130.

91 SvS, Ch. 100.

predecessor King Magnus Erlingsson: emphasizing the divine origin of his power. Magnus had achieved this in being anointed and crowned. Despite the fact that Sverre and Archbishop Eystein had buried the hatchet, the latter refused to offer a royal consecration to the murderer of the king he personally crowned some 20 years earlier. Deprived of the possibility of receiving the sanction of the Church, Sverre was compelled to rely on other means in order to defend his privileged relationship with God. This was to be through the writing of his biography.

The Use of History

Grýla is the first official history written by and for the crown in medieval Norway. With *Grýla*, the kingship entered a field that to a large extent was the monopoly of the Church. As we have seen, history writing in 12th century Norway by and the large was the product of the Norwegian Church and mainly served its aims (see I, 3). We do not know whether the text was the result of a royal command or not. Holm-Olsen has argued that Karl could have come to Norway in connection with a saga of Magnus Erlingsson that he intended to write. In his quest for information, he may have met Sverre who then recruited him to write his own biography.⁹² Sverre may also have heard of the Abbot's presence in Norway and may have appealed to Karl to become the author of his history. However, King Sverre's involvement in the redaction of *Grýla* seems to have been major. As has been mentioned above, according to the prologue of *Sverris saga*, the Icelandic Abbot Karl Jónsson wrote *Grýla* under the close supervision of King Sverre himself. Put this way, Karl appears as a simple scribe and Sverre as the real author who determined what should be written. Sverre's direct involvement in the writing demonstrates that he was aware of the use of history writing as an instrument of royal power. In doing so, he joined his enlightened French, English and Castilian royal counterparts and inaugurated a tradition of royal biographies in Norway, which had long been commonplace in the continental monarchies. The king's interest in history probably stems from his education as a priest at the priest school of Kirkjubøur where he became acquainted not only with the scriptures and hagiographic literature but also with Norse literature.⁹³

On the whole it seems that Sverre had a clear historical perspective of his fight against King Magnus. In an episode that occurred prior to the redaction of *Grýla*, King Sverre already placed his fight in a historical framework. Leaving

92 Ludvig Holm-Olsen. 1953. *Studier i Sverris saga*. Oslo, Nr. 3: 28–29.

93 *Ibid.*, 11–22.

the battlefield of Fimreite, he reached Bergen in June 1184, where he summoned an assembly in order to receive the allegiance of the town. He there held a long speech in which he offered to the audience an overview of the last 25 years of struggle for royal power. Starting with Erling taking the title of earl and crowning his son, he then reviewed the fate of the different legitimate kings or throne pretenders – from King Sigurd Marcusfostre (d. 1163) to King Håkon Herdebrei (1157–62) and Sverre's own brothers – who had been unjustly eliminated at the hand of Erling. The purpose of this was to denounce the relentlessness of his enemy against his kin; a relentlessness which, he implied persisted that very day.⁹⁴

Grýla

Grýla narrates Sverre's path to the throne. It tells of Sverre's childhood in the Faros, his arrival in Norway and the circumstances under which he became the leader of the Birkebeiners. It then depicts Sverre's struggle against Earl Erling and his son King Magnus until both were defeated, depending on when the text stops. The narrative is full of battles and skirmishes. It portrays Sverre as a war leader, emphasizing his qualities as a strategist, his courage and his wisdom. Its main purpose was to present Sverre as a born leader whose kingly vocation was obvious from the very beginning of his life, thereby legitimizing his accession to the throne in 1184.⁹⁵ This political propaganda was however dressed in religious garb. Besides narrating battles and insisting on Sverre's warlike qualities, *Grýla* was also written like a saint's life.

A Hagiographic Twist

As Holm-Olsen has rightly noted, *Grýla* contains significant hagiographic influences.⁹⁶ Why was this particular model chosen? We have stressed Sverre's major role in the authorship of *Grýla*. Could he be responsible for this choice? Sverre was a priest, though an apostate. We should not ignore his degree of learning. Although he was educated in the remote diocese of Kirkjubœur in the Faro Islands, not particularly known as a cultural center, he must have had access directly or indirectly to saint's lives. There are good reasons to believe that Karl stood behind *Grýla*'s hagiographic twist. Firstly, referring once more to the quotation from the prologue about authorship, Sverre chose *what* was to be written whereas Abbot Karl accounted for the redaction itself. More

94 SvS, Ch. 99.

95 Bagge 1996, 58–71.

96 Holm-Olsen 1953, 91–102.

important, the writing of Sverre's history according to the model of a *vita* felt a natural choice for Karl, who had spent most of his life at the monastery of Þingeyrar, a center famous for its literary production, and in particular for its hagiographic activity.⁹⁷

We can also see in the choice of hagiographic biography the key influence of the clerical history writing tradition in the North. In the Middle Ages, hagiography was one model of biography among others. There also existed royal biographies, a model that developed in most of the west European monarchies. Another model was the one supplied by Suetonius. His *De Vita Caesarum* or *Lives of the Caesars* was widely known in Europe, first at the Carolingian court, but also at the Plantagenet court in the 12th century. However, within the Northern cultural sphere of the late 12th century, only one model of biography was available: religious biographies associated with the Gospel and the lives of saints. When Karl and Sverre planned their history, they were mainly faced with a rich and dynamic tradition of Christian biographies, which they could draw inspiration from. In Norway, Eystein Archbishop of Nidaros completed his *Passio et miracula Beati Olavii* approximately at the same time *Grýla* was written.⁹⁸ There is also strong evidence of subsequent hagiographic activity (both translations of foreign lives into the vernacular and original production as well) in Iceland from the second half of the 12th century.⁹⁹ One compelling fact is that probably a Christian biography of a Norwegian king contemporary to *Grýla* existed that may have served as a model for Sverre's own biography: the supposed *vita* of the Norwegian king Ólaf Tryggvason, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, written in the last decades of the 12th century.

In modeling Sverre's life on saint's lives, *Grýla* inscribed a religious and godly pattern into Sverre's biography. As in so many *vitae*, the early life of Sverre is marked by a series of events manifesting and revealing the presence of God. There are a series of features which are traditional and occur repeatedly in saints' lives: Sverre's exceptional fate is revealed in dreams before his birth (Ch. 1); Sverre's mother Gunnhild's pilgrimage to Rome where she is compelled to tell her son of his royal kinship complies with the model of saints' destiny being revealed during penitential journeys (Ch. 4). Finally, Sverre's reluctance to become the leader of the Birkebeiners is also a classical motif of hagiographies, where saints always prefer their humble conditions to prospects of

97 M. Cormack. 2005. "Christian Biography," in Rory McTurck (ed.) *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. Blackwell Publishing: 29–30; Kristjánsson 2007, 152 ff.

98 Ekrem 2000, 138–143.

99 Kristjánsson 2007, 152 ff.

wealth, power and celebrity.¹⁰⁰ The conformity to the hagiographic model is particularly blatant in the narrative of Sverre's dreams and miracles.

*Dramar Sverrir*¹⁰¹

Dreams and in particular prophetic dreams are recurrent features of hagiography. These dreams enable the dreamer to see into the future. They can act as warnings against dangers or they can announce positive outcomes such as the exceptional destiny of the dreamer. *Grýla* includes six dreams. Two are only briefly mentioned but four are thoroughly described. The three first dreams of the text are described in detail. In Chapter 2, Sverre dreams that he is in Norway and is a bird "so large that its beak reached the boundaries of the land in the east, and the feathers of its tail as far north as the dwellings of the Finns, while its wings covered the whole country."¹⁰² The saga tells that a wise man named Einar interpreted the dream and told Sverre that it probably meant that he would become somebody powerful and possibly an archbishop. Sverre expresses his doubts about this and the saga then recounts that he leaves for Norway.

In Sverre's second dream, he is again back in Norway, this time on the side of St Olav fighting against Earl Erling and King Magnus Erlingsson. Olav soon designates Sverre as his standard-bearer and offers his shield to protect him in combat. He thereafter meets Magnus and wins a great victory. In his interpretation of the dream, Sverre saw a confirmation of his future victory over Magnus.¹⁰³ In the third dream, Sverre meets an old man, apparently the Prophet Samuel, who thrice repeats that God sends him. He then asks Sverre to stretch out his hands, which he sanctifies with holy oil. Samuel then makes a prayer wishing that Sverre's hands will be "strong to hate foes and opponents, and to govern much people."¹⁰⁴ Although the saga says that nobody is able to interpret the dream, the anointing of Sverre's hands together with the words of Samuel about ruling people can be seen to refer to royal unction without any great difficulty.

These three dreams announce in the right chronology and in a prophetic manner the history of Sverre's accession to the royal office. First, he leaves for Norway where he is called to a great destiny. Second, he successfully fights

¹⁰⁰ Holm-Olsen 1953, 91–92.

¹⁰¹ "Sverri's dream" (SvS, Ch. 4).

¹⁰² *fva miclom at nef hanftoc aufr til landz-enda en væli-fiaðrar hanftoku norðr i Finnbuin. En með vængionum hulpi hann landit allt.* (SvS, Ch. 2).

¹⁰³ SvS, Ch. 5.

¹⁰⁴ *til hatrfvið uvini oc motfloðu-menn fina at ftiorna morgom lyðum* (SvS, Ch. 10).

against King Magnus Erlingsson and his father. Finally, he becomes king by the grace of God.

The presence of St Olaf and the prophet Samuel in the dreams is important each in its special way, because they give Sverre's destiny a divine character. As we have previously seen, St Olaf was the patron saint of Norway and the prototype of the righteous king. His symbolic commitment to Sverre was highly valuable for the king. St Olaf designated Sverre as his real successor, which suggested that King Magnus, whose royal legitimacy largely rested on his connection to the saint, had no valid claim to the throne. In the choice of Prophet Samuel, Sverre could have found no better model corresponding to his aims. Like Samuel who, in the Bible, was the leader of the people of Israel against the oppression of brutal rule, Sverre led his followers against the tyranny of the earl and his son. More importantly, Samuel was also the one who anointed King David, the prototype of the Christian king.

"God granted them His Gracious Mercy":¹⁰⁵ Miracles

The presence of God is also conspicuous in the narrative of miracles, which is *per se* the trademark of saint's lives. *Grýla* includes three miracles. The first tells of Sverre's march through the forests of Vermland, where Sverre happened to cross a lake on a raft he made with his men. The raft could scarcely bear the weight of its passengers. Yet in order to save one of his followers, Sverre commanded the raft to go to the shore and to take the man onto it. The raft was now clearly overloaded, but managed to carry Sverre and his men to the other side of the lake. When Sverre, who was the last to leave the vessel, went on shore, "the raft sank like a stone."¹⁰⁶ Those present marveled at the event and assumed "that it had borne one who was destined to do great deeds that were yet undone, and to hold higher rank than he yet held."¹⁰⁷ The second miracle occurred in the mountains of Raudefjell. Lost and starving, Sverre and his troops were climbing the steep sides of a mountain when they encountered a violent winter storm. Sverre then asked his men to join their hands and to loudly pray for God's mercy. At once the tempest ceased and "sunshine, bright weather, and a balmy air, as if the time were midsummer, broke suddenly over them."¹⁰⁸ In the last miracle, Sverre was engaged in naval combat with Magnus Erlingsson on the coast south of Nidaros. At some point, Sverre's ship was in difficulty. He tried to escape but Magnus's boat was gaining on him. Sverre then

¹⁰⁵ *Hafði guð fva braða oc haleita míf cun* (SvS, Ch. 20).

¹⁰⁶ *Oc þegar er hann steig af fauck flotinn fem stein* (SvS, Ch. 13).

¹⁰⁷ *er hann flaut undir mannfarminom. en fauck þann tíma er men varo honom.* (*Ibid.*).

¹⁰⁸ *gerþi þegar heiðviðri oc fol-fcín. oc fva blitt veðr fem um mitt fumar væri.* (SvS, Ch. 20).

prayed St Olav to save them. Out of nowhere, a thick mist suddenly appeared on the sea, which hid Sverre's escape.¹⁰⁹

These three miracles aimed to show that God protected and supported Sverre. It also portrays Sverre as saint ready to endanger his own life in acts of charity, such as when he welcomed a companion onto his raft and saved his life. The intercession of Saint Olav in the last miracle strengthened the intimate relationship between the saint and Sverre. Last but not least, the author of *Grýla*, with the Old Testament in mind, developed large portions of Sverre's activities and peregrinations to serve prophetic ends.

Sverre in the Wilderness

Grýla depicts Sverre's early leadership over the Birkebeiners as a period of severe hardship and uncertainty. The disloyalty and the lack of discipline of his men made Sverre doubt the success of his undertaking.¹¹⁰ Everywhere they went, they met with constant adversity both from men and nature. The marches through the forests were difficult and the men suffered hunger and cold.¹¹¹ When Sverre and his group, exhausted, finally reached inhabited regions in Jemtland he met with the opposition of the inhabitants.¹¹² The parallel with Moses is obvious and has been noted in earlier scholarship.¹¹³ The recurring accounts of the privation, suffering and danger in which Sverre and his group lived in the forest of Jemtland (Ch. 12, 13 and 14) and in the mountains of Jotunheimen (Ch. 19) were like Moses' years in the wilderness for Sverre; an initiatory journey meant to forge solidarity and to test the courage and determination of Sverre and his companions. The context of the initiatory journey also serves to reveal God's support and protection. When the group is in danger and its leader is not able to fulfill his mission on his own, God directly intervenes through miracles to save Sverre and the Birkebeiners. The parallel with Moses aimed to demonstrate that Sverre was an instrument of God, who had placed in the king's hands a people whom he had to lead to their destiny.

109 SvS, Ch. 32.

110 SvS, Ch. 11.

111 SvS, Ch. 12.

112 SvS, Ch. 14.

113 Holm-Olsen 91–102. It could be added that the association forged between Moses and the king is attested in a contemporary German chronicle which describes Frederick Barbarossa as "quasi alter Møyses" (another Moses) *Gesta Treverorum Continuatio*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores*, vol. 24 (Leipzig 1879), 388–89.

The author thus employs different procedures borrowed from Christian biographies, dreams, miracles and the path of initiation in order to show God's presence in every step of Sverre's struggle for kingship.

The Reception Context

The question now arising is whether the work remained a stillborn project or whether it achieved its purpose and reached its intended audience. To answer this, we need to assess *Grýla* as a means of communication that is, as a work that actually was accessible to an audience. The task is complex, as *Sverris saga* has basically swallowed up *Grýla* as a research topic.¹¹⁴ However, there are indications that *Grýla* was a text with an existence of its own. Evidence is scarce, but the prologues to the different versions of the saga provide compelling information. As mentioned above, we know that the text was written in two different steps: Karl Jónsson and King Sverre wrote a first part called *Grýla* between 1185 and 1189, and a second part was penned c. 1210. What happened with the text between these two dates is unknown. The fact remains that *Grýla* existed as a text of its own between its redaction and the drafting of the second part in the two first decades of the 13th century.

Political Ambitions

There is a consensus that, from the project's inception, King Sverre aimed at writing his full biography. *Sverris saga* was the final product aimed for and if it was not achieved at first that was because something came in the way, such as the departure of Abbot Karl to Iceland. In the meantime, *Grýla* remained unfinished until it was taken again out in the early 13th century in order to be completed. This view is based on the fact that we have no individual manuscript of *Grýla* and that there is no mention of *Grýla's* existence of as a text of its own in the secondary sources. However, the absence of references to *Grýla* is no proof of its non-existence. For instance, the anti-clerical pamphlet *A speech against the bishops*, which was contemporary to events named in *Sverris saga* and a decisive element in the king's combat against the clergy, is not mentioned a single time in the text, nor in later sagas.

¹¹⁴ Here follows just a few studies concerned with the length of *Grýla*. Holm-Olsen 1953, 30–84; L. Holm-Olsen. 1977. "Til diskusjonen om Sverres sagas tilblivelse." *Opuscula Septentrionalia. Festskrift til Ole Widding* 10. 10. 1977: 55–67; P.A. Munch. 1852. *Det norske Folks Historie*. Christiania, Tønsberg: 390 ff.; Koht 1921, 181 ff; IGustav Indrebø. 1920. «Innledning.» *Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4^o*. Kristiania: LXXV ff; Brekke 1958.

Ultimately, nothing proves that the project was not achieved successfully in the 12th century. We have to keep in mind what was at the core of the project. King Sverre did not commit himself personally to the project with the firm intention of starting his own biography and then waiting for somebody to complete it after his death, but because he had a very concrete political use for it. The narrative of *Grýla* aimed at demonstrating that he was chosen by God to be king to an audience which was opposed to his rule. If Sverre committed himself to the project, it was because the text was decisive in his strategy to establish his authority. Although we do not know whether Sverre's project came to completion, the extent of *Grýla*, which is presumed to span his birth to the death of Earl Erling or King Magnus, by and large would have sufficed to fulfill Sverre's expectations. In view of this and of Sverre's personal commitment to the project, we can barely believe that he would have allowed *Grýla* to be a stillborn project. We can hardly find a year during his reign in which Sverre did not need the support and legitimacy that such a book would have provided him with. King Sverre thus had every reason for the text to exist and fulfill its specific task.

The Manuscripts

A closer examination of the saga's prologue will provide some insight. Great uncertainty surrounds the making of *Sverris saga*. The only source of information stems from the prologue of the saga itself. There is no surviving original manuscript of the saga and the extant narrative is preserved in four later manuscripts: two are from c. 1300, AM 327, 4^o and AM 47 fol., another one is from the Flatey book (Gks 1005 fol.) dating from c. 1380, and a last, late one is from the Skálholtsbók (AM 81 a fol.) from the 16th century.¹¹⁵ These manuscripts are all copies of copies and contain errors and omissions. Although each of the four versions contains different prologues, a group composed of AM 327, 4^o, AM 47 fol. and AM 81 a fol. show many similarities; they have more or less the same length and we find only few terminological differences. This first group of manuscripts is considered the closest to the original. The prologue of the Flatey book stands apart. It is much longer and contains two extra paragraphs, which at some point must have been added by a copyist. Each of these groups of prologues provides different information suggesting that *Grýla* existed and was read independently of *Sverris saga*.

115 Gustav Indrebø. 1920. *Sverris saga*. Kristiania: XXXI–LI.

A book

The prologue from the first group of manuscripts explicitly designates *Grýla* as a book.

The beginning of the book is written according to the book that Abbot Karl Jónsson first wrote when King Sverre himself sat over him and settled what he should write. The story has not come far. It tells of certain of his battles, and as the book advances, his strength grows, foreshadowing the greater events. They therefore called this part of the book *Grýla*.¹¹⁶

Thus all three prologues refer to a book was written by Abbot Karl and King Sverre: *eiptir þeirri bok er fyrft ritaði Karl aboti Ion-fon*. Although Karl Jónsson may have been the author of *Sverris saga*, this particular book can only refer to *Grýla* as it also includes King Sverre. This is the sole reference to *Grýla* as an independent book in this group of manuscripts. Later in the prologue, *Grýla* is referred to as part of the book: *lut bocar*. The prologue given in the Flatey book also refers to *Grýla* as a book:

Here we begin to speak of events that were committed to memory by men self who first compiled this book, and after the book which Abbot Karl wrote with the full confidence of King Sverre himself.¹¹⁷

The manuscript is presented as a palimpsest of copies of copies. Again, the work of King Sverre and Abbot Karl is designated as a book. In the subsequent sections of the prologue, this work is also referred to as “the first part of the book, *Grýla*.” Later, the prologue designates a second part which is given the Latin name *Perfectam Fortitudinem*.¹¹⁸ It appears clear that the authors of these manuscripts made a clear distinction between a “book” and a “part of a book.” The first question to ask is: Why should the writers and copyists of the prologues call *Grýla* a book if it was an unfinished manuscript? Or did it exist as a

116 *Er þat uphaf bocariNar er ritat er eiptir þeirri bok er fyrft ritaði Karl aboti Ion-fon. en yfir fat sialfr Sverrir konungr. oc reð fyrir hvat rita skyllði er fu fra-fogn eigi langt fram komin. þar er sagt fra nockorum hanf orroftum. Oc fua fem a liðr bokina vex hanf styrkir. oc fegir fa hinn fami styrkr fyrir hina meiri luti. kalloðu þeir þan lut bocar fyrir þui Grylu. (SvS, Prologus in Gks 1005 fol.).*

117 *Hér hefr upp at segja frá þeim tíðindum, er gjörzt hafa í þeirra manna minnum sjálfra, er þessa bók hafa í fyrstu samansett, ok eptir þeirri bók ritaði Karl ábóti Jónsson með fullu vitorði sjálfs Sverris konungs (Ibid.).*

118 *En hinn síðara hlut bókarinnar kalla menn perfectam fortitudinem (Ibid.).*

book, that is, a text that was circulated and read? An examination of the name “Grýla” and in particular of the circumstances surrounding its selection may provide some further insights.

Title

The issue of the titles of medieval texts is a difficult one as there seems to have been no established tradition for giving titles to written works in the Middle Ages. It is true that most often medieval works have come to us without any title or prologue. Sometimes the absence of a title was the result of later copyists’ lack of interest in duplicating parts that they believed were useless and uninteresting, only keeping the main body of the text.¹¹⁹ As a result, an incredible number of medieval texts have definitely lost one of their most valuable parts. Several medieval works however have come down to us with a title and a prologue in which the author gives an explanation for his choice. The English chronicler Orderic Vitalis (1075–1142) wrote in the prologue of his *Historia Ecclesiastica* that he “shall search out and give to the world the modern history of Christendom, venturing to call my unpretending work ‘An Ecclesiastical History.’”¹²⁰ Closer to *Grýla*, we have the example of the *Historia Norwegie* where the author starts the main part of his book with *I Incipit liber primus in ystoria Norwagensium*, “I here begin the first book of the History of the Norwegians.”¹²¹ On the other hand, Snorri’s *Heimskringla* is not known to have had a title before the 17th century, when the two first words of surviving manuscripts, *kringla heimsins* “the circle of the world” were used to designate it.¹²²

The very principle of giving a title to a text strongly suggests that the text has an existence of its own. A title distinguishes a book from a text. The choice of title is the result of a process centered on an understanding of what the text is about. A title should reflect the content of the book. It implies that the author of a title is well acquainted with the text. The choice of the title is thus most often the prerogative of its author. Rudolf Meissner has defended the idea that it was more natural to give a name to a book than to a part of a book. In his view, *Grýla* was the Norse name given by Karl Jónsson to the *Sverris saga*, whereas “*Perfecta fortitudinem*” was its Latin title.¹²³ With these considerations in mind we can now turn to *Grýla* as a title and the

119 Guénée 1980, 200–202.

120 *OV*, 3.

121 *HN*, Ch. 1.

122 “Heimskringla”, by Hallvard Lie, *KLNM* Vol. VI: 299.

123 M. Niemeyer. 1902. *Die Strengleikar. Ein beitrage zur geschichte der altnordischen prosaliteratur*. Halle a.S: 18–19.

circumstances surrounding the choice of the word, which I contend strengthen the idea that the text, which Abbot Karl and King Sverre wrote together, reached an audience.

The word “Grýla” refers to a mythological ogress living in the mountains of Iceland who ate children.¹²⁴ The character was popular in stories made to frighten children. The term *Grýla* thus designated something that was frightening but in the end could not be taken seriously. The meaning of *Grýla* as something threatening is confirmed in contemporary Icelandic sagas. *Borgils saga skarða* states that “Sturla...þótti þeir gört hafa sér grýlur um sumarit.”¹²⁵ In *Þórðar saga hreðu* (c. 1350), when Ormr Þorsteinsson says to Sigríðr Þórðardóttir, “Ekki hirði ek um grýlur yðrar”, the “grýlur” is in this case the threat of Sigríðr’s brothers.¹²⁶

Our two groups of manuscripts give different explanations concerning the circumstances surrounding the choice of the name and the identity of its authors. In the first set of manuscripts, the name of “Grýla” is said to have been given by the authors of the text/book, Abbot Karl and King Sverre: “They therefore called this part of the book *Gryla*.”¹²⁷ It has been argued that that choice was Sverre’s and reflected his taste for Icelandic folklore.¹²⁸ If the prologues are right, this would strengthen the hypothesis that the authors finished the book and simply gave it a title. However one can question how pertinent the choice of *Grýla* was as title for a book that was meant to emphasize the divine origin of Sverre’s power. This discrepancy is hardly plausible. Of course we can imagine that in using this name, its authors most likely meant not to frighten the readers, but to suggest that the book contained something threatening and powerful. Modern editors would certainly appreciate the choice of such a title meant to awaken the audience’s interest. Although Sverre was a master of propaganda, we can hardly credit him with having such considerations...or can we? It is my contention that the word “Gryla” did not really suit a work of propaganda, which was meant to convince and seduce.

Moreover, it appears that whether it was Sverre who chose the name or not, the writer of the prologue does not really give a good explanation for the name of *Grýla*. He simply connects its choice to “The story [...] tells of certain battles,

124 T.A. Gunnell. 2001. “Grýla, Grýlur, ‘Grøleks’ and Skeklers: Medieval Disguise Traditions in the North-Atlantic?” *Arv* 57: 33–54; Einar Már Jónsson. 2008. “Leitin að Grýlu.” *Skírnir* 182: 241–245.

125 *Sts*, II, 213.

126 *Þórðar saga hreðu*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson. In *Íslenzk fornrit XIV*, 1959: 161–226.

127 *kalloðu þeir þan lut bocar fyrir þui Grylu* (SvS, prologue).

128 E.M. Jónsson. “Leitin að Grýlu.” *Skírnir* 182: 241–245.

and as the book advances, his strength grows, foreshadowing the greater events." The explanation rather refers to Sverre's increasing strength, which was probably terrifying to many, but it fails to render the whole meaning of *Grýla*. Furthermore, the ogress Gryla is never associated with strength and power, but as mentioned above with threat. The longer prologue of Gks 1005 fol. provides a much better explanation.

This prologue poses several methodological problems, as it is supposed to have been greatly reworked by one of its copyists, an Icelandic monk of the early 13th century, Styrmir Kárason (1170–1245),¹²⁹ or by a second copyist in the late 14th century, Priest Magnus Þorhallsson.¹³⁰ Thus in addition to the usual text found in the three other manuscripts, the long prologue from the Flatey book contains two supplementary paragraphs: a genealogy of Sverre from his father back to Adam, and a detailed explanation of the reason why the name of *Grýla* was given to the book. It must be noted that apart from the prologue, the rest of the text does not significantly differ from the other manuscripts. Thus, even though the copyist made some changes, we can assume that they wished to keep it as close to the original in their possession. The Norwegian scholar Egil Brekke's study of *Sverris saga*'s authorship and dating has been thoroughly criticized by his contemporaries, however his examination of the prologue of *Sverris saga* in the Flatey book escaped these critics and, in my opinion, largely succeeded to rehabilitate the value of this manuscript.¹³¹ According to Brekke, Styrmir was responsible for the drafting of the prologue and not Magnus, which in itself makes the additional parts almost contemporary with the redaction of the saga. If this is true, then Styrmir's version is the oldest of all other manuscripts, and perhaps the closest to the original!

Much like the other manuscripts, the prologue of GkS 1005 fol. tells that *Sverris saga* is composed of two parts, but it provides additional supplementary information. Here, too, the prologue mentions a first part, which was given the name "Grýla." It also mentions a second part, which was named *Perfectam fortitudinem*. Holm-Olsen suggested that the word *fortitudo* somehow was closely connected to King Sverre. He pointed out that Sverre's epitaph on his

129 Styrmir Kárason (1170–1245) was an Icelandic priest and personal secretary for Snorri Sturluson at Reykholt. Somehow he is related to *Þingeyrar* cloister where his father can have been abbot before Karl Jónsson. Styrmir wrote a version of the Saga of Saint Olav known as *Lífssaga Ólafs Helga eftir Styrimi fróða*, and the version of the *Sverris saga*, which is to be found in the Flateyjarbók.

130 The *Flateyjarbók* is usually dated from ca. 1390. "Flateyjarbók," by Jakob Benediktsson, KLNLM Vol. IV: 412.

131 Brekke 1958, 155 ff.

tomb most probably contained the word “fortitude” and that the word was used particularly in David’s psalms from the Old Testament, which Sverre used and quoted frequently in his speeches.¹³² According to Brekke, this Latin title was given by Styrmir and reflected an anti-clericalism found in the circle of the Birkebeiners. Thus much suggests that the title of the second part was coined during a period starting under the reign of King Sverre and stretching to the 1220s, when Styrmir probably copied the saga.

The version of the Flatey book distinguishes itself from the other versions through its lengthy explanation of the word “Grýla.”

People called the first part of the book *Grýla* because many believed that worry or fear to do with great wars or battles might arise, but that it would then quickly fade away and vanish into thin air, as it reasonably could be expected to in view of the strength and superiority of what was facing. It was Earl Erling and his son Magnus who had enough support from friends and kin. But neither goods nor kin supported Sverre and no friends either, as one should know, as he came in the country young and alone and unknown to any. It would probably have gone this way, as many expected, if God himself in Heaven had not wanted to support him.¹³³

In this version, the word “Grýla” receives a thorough explanation that fits the meaning it had in popular culture: the armed conflict between Sverre and Earl Erling and his son Magnus constituted a great threat to peace, but the balance of power was so strongly in favor of the Earl and the King that the conflict was expected to resolve itself rapidly had God not intervened on Sverre’s side. The whole explanation is a much better match for the purpose of the book *Grýla*: to illustrate how desperate Sverre’s cause was and how decisive the support of God was in Sverre’s success. According to this prologue however, it was *kölluðu menn*, “some people,” who came up with the name *Grýla* on the basis of the general perception of the text’s content. This time neither King Sverre nor Karl Jónsson are mentioned as authors. The

¹³² Holm-Olsen 1953, 55 ff.

¹³³ *kölluðu menn því enn fyrri hlut bókarinnar Grýlu, at margir menn töluðu, at þá efnaðist nokkur ótti eðr hræsla, sakir mikils stríðs ok bardaga, en mundi skjótt niðrfalla, ok at alls eingu verða, sem oll likendi þóttu til standa sakir styrks ok ofreflis þess er í móti var. sem var Erlíngr jarl ok Magnús sun hans er noga hófðu vini ok frændastyrk. en Sverri studdi huarki fê nê frændr eigi heldr vinir sem vita mátti þó hann kæmi úngr ok einmana ok ollum úkunnigr inn í landit mundi sva ok farit hafa sem margir ætluðu nema sjálfr guð í himinríki hefði hann viljat styrkja (SvS, Prologus in Gks 1005 fol.).*

question that arises is when this part of the narrative was given its title. Was this done after the saga was finished or before its completion? If the men who named *Grýla* did so after having read the whole saga this would be quite striking, given that decades of modern scholarship were never able to determine accurately where the second part of the text starts; for then contemporaries would have clearly identified the first part and been able to give it a title based on its content. This may have been possible because *Grýla* was more clearly split from the rest of the saga, for instance when *Grýla* existed as independent work.

It is difficult to ascribe overriding validity to any of the prologues. None of them provides an unambiguous interpretation. The fact remains that the prologue of the Flatey book explains with great care the circumstances surrounding the redaction of *Sverris saga*, which in itself implies that they were complex and needed clarification. As mentioned earlier, it is an accepted fact that the saga was made up of two different parts that were written at two different times. In addition to this, the two parts revealed major stylistic and narrative differences and in one manuscript were given two different titles. Nevertheless, *Grýla* has never been considered as an independent book, composed for a defined purpose in a defined context. The analysis above only provides a tentative and rather summary attempt to show that the prologues reveal some elements – designation of *Grýla* as a book, circumstances surrounding the choice of the title – that suggest that *Grýla* existed as an independent book and circulated as such in the population.

Audience

Whether the text was read or not, its authors had a specific audience in mind. Basically Sverre's recognition of his legitimacy was a countrywide issue that addressed Norwegian society in its entirety. Potentially, the text thus aimed at a broad audience. The fact that *Grýla* was written in the vernacular and not in Latin certainly speaks in favor of a broad reception. But because of the nature of the struggle for power, Sverre's propaganda aimed both to strengthen the conviction of Sverre's supporters and to win over his adversaries. The attribution of the name of "Grýla" suggests that the book was read by an audience at worst hostile and at best skeptical towards Sverre. The name was not really suited to Sverre's propaganda, which on the contrary sought to convince and seduce. What would Sverre have to win by frightening his audience? The book was thus most probably read by his enemies who named it pejoratively. Among these latter the clergy in particular can be noted. The Norwegian Church had been a solid ally of King Magnus Erlingsson up until his death. Though the archbishop did not directly oppose the new king in the second

half of the 1180s, we know that other prelates were directly involved in the party of Jon Kuflungs.¹³⁴

A Model Suited to Broad Reception...and Propaganda

The very hagiographic characteristics of *Grýla* offered optimal conditions for its royal propaganda to reach a broad audience and not only a clerical one. In the Middle Ages, hagiographic texts were used in different ways and reached different audiences.¹³⁵ They were not only meant for private perusal; saint's lives were also destined to be read out loud before large audiences. For texts in Latin, oral delivery meant the audience might also include those acquainted with spoken Latin, even if their skills in written Latin were limited.¹³⁶ When the text was delivered orally in the vernacular, as was the case with *Grýla*, it reached an even larger audience of illiterates. Similarly, the reception of hagiographies went beyond the sphere of churches and monasteries. Hagiographical texts could be read out loud at royal palaces and in village squares. For instance, on the saint's days, large portions of the population came in contact with this literature. Attendance at these celebrations often was obligatory for the lay population and important passage of the saints' *vitae* were read out loud and even translated from Latin into the vernacular for the congregation. Furthermore, saints' lives were actively used in sermons and homilies as moral models, thereby reaching a wide audience.¹³⁷ Finally, hagiographical texts were sources of knowledge and wisdom which the lay literate elite also accessed. Thus, in practice hagiographic literature was a common medium of communication in medieval societies. It addressed a large audience stretching from the elite to the populace and from the educated to the unlearned and was thus inherently adapted to propaganda.

Saint's lives were very popular in Norway, just as they were in the rest of Europe. In the Norwegian context, hagiographical texts were also present in

¹³⁴ Krag 2005: 130.

¹³⁵ Van Egmond 1999, 41–67.

¹³⁶ B. De Gaiffier. 1967. "L'Hagiographie et son public au XI^e siècle." *Études critiques d'hagiographie et d'iconologie*. Brussels: 475–507; M. Van Uytanghe. 1985. "L'hagiographie et son public à l'époque mérovingienne." in E.A. Livingstone (ed.) *Studia Patristica xvi. Papers presented to the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1975*. Berlin: 54–62.

¹³⁷ J.W. O'Malley. 1989. "Introduction: medieval preaching." in T.L. Amos, E.A. Green & B.M. Kienzle (ed.) *De ore domini. Preacher and world in the Middle Ages*. Western Michigan University: 1–11; J. Longère. 1983. *La prédication médiévale*. Paris: Etudes augustinienes; Gille Constable. 1994. "The Language of Preaching in the Twelfth Century." *Viator*, Vol. 25: 131–152; Van Egmond 1999, 57 ff.

society: we know from the *Ordo Nidrosiensis Ecclesia* that the Life of St Olav, *Passio et miracula Beati Olavii*, was to be read out loud during the celebration of Olav in July that attracted an important crowd.¹³⁸ The need to reach a broad and illiterate audience is also evident in the translations of *Vitae* into Norse like the Life of St Eustace and the life of Virgin Mary, which were translated respectively as *Plácidus saga* and *Mariu saga* in the late 12th century and early 13th century.¹³⁹ In choosing this model, Sverre was thus not alienating an important part of his potential audience. On the contrary, the hagiographic genre reached the largest audience available at the time.

The modeling of Sverre's biography on the example of saint's lives made the reception of the themes developed in *Grýla* easier. Through hagiographic texts as well as other religious texts the population was accustomed to tales of miracles and divinatory dreams. These phenomena were part of a common Christian mental universe and appealed to the popular imagination. The divine pattern of Sverre's accession to the throne, which is *Grýla*'s central theme, was easily comprehended by the population as it was in keeping with a general understanding of the world as God's work.

Conclusion

After his military victory over his enemies, Sverre had still to win the heart of his opponents. Sverre's autobiography was the device that was to strengthen his legitimate claim to the Norwegian kingship by inscribing his fate in God's plan.

Grýla is the first object that epitomizes the duality in the development of royal communication under the reign of King Sverre. The biography, as a text written by the kingship for the kingship, was the first of its kind in Norwegian history. In this, *Grýla* broke with the monopoly until then exerted by the Church. It inaugurated an autonomous written communication system, which would later be fully employed by Norwegian monarchs. At the same time, *Grýla* as a means of communication illustrates the impact of the clerical communication system on royal communication in the end of the 12th century. Despite Sverre's involvement in the drafting and the clear royalist purpose of the text, the communication system of the Church dominated the Norwegian society to such an extent that it was impossible for King Sverre to override it. As we have seen, his biography largely adopted the Church's canons of written communication. It uses literary traits and stylistic devices borrowed from

138 "Lectiones de passion eius in .i.º et .i.º legatur nocturno vel sermo de uno martyre," in Gjerlow 1968: 372.

139 "Marialegender" by Ole widding. KLN M XI : 401–404.

hagiographies and bases its political argumentation on the Christian religion. These were prerequisites for royal propaganda at the end of the 12th century to reach a broad audience in an effective way.

The existence of *Grýla* as a text that reached the audience it was written for amounts to a great deal of guesswork and tentative hypothesis. While some elements are suggestive, the impact of the text remains difficult to determine. The sole source is precisely the saga itself. The saga contains several awkward omissions. For instance, Sverre's anticlerical pamphlet, the *Speech against the bishops*, which was written during the conflict with the Norwegian clergy and the papacy (c. 1194–98), is not alluded at all in the saga.

4 Fighting Fire with Fire: Anticlerical Propaganda

As regards communication, the conflict with the Church under King Sverre was remarkable. Few, if any, periods of Norwegian medieval history witnessed such communicative activity. Over the course of few years (1190–1202), the Norwegian Church and King Sverre instigated intense propaganda campaigns using a broad spectrum of means to promote their views: letters, diplomas, speeches, church sermons, political pamphlets and histories.

The stakes of the conflict were both political and theoretical. The Church had sided with Magnus Erlingsson against Sverre since the very beginning of their struggle for royal power. It had made him the sole legitimate ruler of Norway in providing him with a sacred dimension (coronation, association with St Olav). The Church's support had been guaranteed by extensive political and economic privileges which secured the clergy an advantageous position in Norwegian society. The rise of Sverre in 1177 directly endangered all these achievements, and the Church fought the newcomer with the greatest resolution. With the death of Magnus at the battle of Fimreite in 1184, the archbishop and a great deal of the clergy took up the struggle and the lead of Magnus's party. This clerical leadership cast the conflict not only as a confrontation between political parties, but also as an opposition between the *regnum* and the *sacerdotium*. From then on, the Church and Sverre were to fight on all counts simultaneously.

On the one hand, under the leadership of the Church, the struggle continued on the battlefield. During most of the 1190s, Sverre faced a series of rebellions sustained by the Norwegian clergy. In particular, Bishop Nicholas Arneson of Oslo seems to have been a leading character in the opposition to Sverre, plotting to destabilize the king. In the summer of 1193, he organized the uprising of the *Eyjarskeggjar* in the Orkneys. The rebels took control of the

Viken and Vestlandet, but in the winter of 1194 they were defeated by Sverre's forces at the battle of Floravågar.¹⁴⁰ Two years later, in 1196, again at the instigation of Nicholas and Archbishop Eirik, a new faction of opponents to King Sverre formed around the pretender Inge Magnusson, a half-brother of King Inge Haraldsson (1135–1161). The party took the name “Baglers,” which in Old Norse referred to the Episcopal cross and clearly emphasized the clergy's deep involvement in the movement.

The main weapon of the Church however was not the sword but the word, which the institution counted upon heavily. Inevitably, in any conflict with the Church or with indirect involvement of the clergy, the struggle on the battlefield would simultaneously be accompanied by an intellectual confrontation. As Cassiodorus, a historian of late antiquity, wrote, the Church had “to fight against the illicit temptations of the devil with pen and ink. Every work of the Lord written by the scribe is a wound inflicted on Satan.”¹⁴¹ Thereby, besides supporting and inciting rebellion, the Norwegian Church developed an intense propaganda campaign against King Sverre including letters and sermons. The only way for the king to respond to the Church's attacks was to use the written word as well.

A Campaign of Propaganda

From the early 1190s and virtually up until the king's death, both the archbishops of Nidaros and the king conducted intense propaganda against each other, using any means available to win public opinion: defamatory missives, forgeries and public expositions. Much of this propaganda involved the popes. In 1191, Archbishop Eirik was forced into exile in Lund. Anticipating a condemnation by the papacy, Sverre sent a letter to Rome to Pope Clement III criticizing the behavior of his archbishop.¹⁴² Archbishop Eirik also sent letters to the pope depicting the crimes and offences of Sverre against his clergy.¹⁴³ The death of Clement in March 1191 interrupted these libelous maneuvers temporarily. The new pope, Celestine III, was immediately absorbed by the aggressive politics of the German Emperor Henry VI and he did not respond to his archbishop's requests.

Eirik waited for more favorable conditions to renew his propagandistic attacks. The archbishop and his bishop in Oslo simultaneously devised a military campaign against Sverre and a new propagandistic offensive in Rome.

140 SvS, Ch. 123.

141 *Institutiones*, ed. R.A.B. Mynors. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961, I: xxx.

142 SvS, Ch. 117.

143 SvS, Ch. 121.

The military action was supported by the king of Denmark, Knut VI, and by the Jarls of Orkneys and the Hebrides. King Sverre defeated the rebellion in naval battle at Floravågar early in 1194. The attacks from Rome were to prove more arduous to thwart. Eirik and Archbishop Absalon of Lund sent envoys to Rome with a letter to the pope. On 15 June 1194, Pope Celestine III answered Eirik's requests in a bull by which he confirmed the rights of his highest representative in Norway. In the same letter, the pope also threatened Sverre with excommunication if he did not respect apostolic rights.¹⁴⁴

Comforted by papal support, Eirik launched virulent attacks on Sverre. According to the saga, the papal bull was read out loud in the church and "every Sunday the ban upon King Sverre was proclaimed in the chancel."¹⁴⁵ At this stage, we do not know whether Sverre was excommunicated or not, and whether it was the pope or Eirik who was responsible for it. Even though it was a papal prerogative, Eirik may well have pronounced Sverre's excommunication. Apparently the archbishop was accustomed to the practice, for in a letter of 1204, the pope noted his displeasure with his archbishop's personal initiative in excommunicating King Håkon Sverresson.¹⁴⁶

On 29 June 1194, the few bishops still loyal to the king crowned him in Christ Church in Bergen (See II, 2). This event radicalized the confrontation. The news of the pope's threat of excommunication soon came to Sverre's ear. He suggested that the papal bull was a forgery made by the archbishop and denied it held any validity.¹⁴⁷ However, on 18 November 1194, Celestine III pronounced the bishops who had participated in Sverre's coronation excommunicate.¹⁴⁸ Persuaded that Eirik alone stood behind the excommunication, in the summer of 1195 Sverre sent two envoys, Bishop Tore from Hamar and a Benedictine monk from his court, Richard, to the pope with a letter, probably in order to obtain a papal disavowal of his archbishop.¹⁴⁹ According to the saga, the messengers were on their way back with a cardinal when they suddenly died in Denmark. Shortly after, a group of Danes came to the king with a letter, which they claimed they had been entrusted with by the bishop shortly before he died. The letter, which bore the papal seal, was read out loud immediately and was shown in public. The saga affirms that in the letter the pope confirmed his

144 DN II, nr. 3.

145 *lyfti hvern funnu-dag a cor uppi banni yfir Sverri konungi.* (SvS, Ch. 121).

146 DN VI, nr. 9.

147 SvS, Ch. 121.

148 The event is related in a letter from abbed William of Ebelholt to the pope in 1195, DN VI, nr. 4.

149 SvS, Ch. 124.

trust in Sverre and lifted the excommunication from him and his realm.¹⁵⁰ The document probably was a forgery. Indeed, in a letter from October 1198, Pope Innocent III accused Sverre of having earlier “copied the seal of our predecessor, pope C[elastini], and sealed with it many letters.”¹⁵¹ Bishop Tore and Richard most probably did not get what they were looking for from the papacy. Instead what they found in Rome was a black market for epistolary forgeries and false relics. Tore and Richard probably acquired there (or in any abbey from Germany to Italy) a false document with a counterfeit papal seal.¹⁵²

In January 1198, the aged Pope Celestine passed away and was succeeded by a young and energetic leader, Innocent III. The new pope quickly committed himself totally to the conflict with Sverre. He had several reasons for this. Innocent was a resolute fighter for the “liberties of the Church,” intent on bending recalcitrant princes, like King Sverre, to Rome’s will.¹⁵³ The other reason may have been more personal. Prior to his papal office, Innocent, then Cardinal Lothar of Segni, appears to have been deeply engaged in the hunting down of charter forgers and counterfeiters. In 1198, he even wrote a book, *De Crimine falsi*, in which he formulated detailed and precise rules for revealing counterfeits. More remarkably, Innocent III relates that in the preceding years he had discovered a center of forgers in Rome itself, where a number of false bulls had been prepared, bearing forged seals either of his predecessor or of himself.¹⁵⁴ Could this be the place where Tore and Richard obtained their document? There is little doubt that the episode with the Norwegian king contributed significantly both to inspire and illustrate Innocent’s work.

Whether guilty of forgery or not, after this episode Sverre’s cause did not improve. Innocent strove to isolate Sverre. Letters were sent to foreign leaders to ally themselves against the Norwegian king. In the summer of 1198, the bishops of Iceland received a letter from the pope in which he commanded them to fight against their fellow countrymen who dared to sympathize with Sverre’s cause.¹⁵⁵ In a letter from October 1198, the pope instructed the Swedish earl

150 SvS, Ch. 128.

151 *C. pape predecessoris nostri bullam falsare non timuit, qua uarias litteras sigillauit; sed is, cui manifesta sunt omnia, eius falsitatem detexit.* (DN VI, nr. 7). In a previous letter (4. September 1198) Innocent had already denounced falsifications of papal Bulls and seals.

152 Angel Canellas Lopez. 1991. *Falsos y falsificaciones de documentos diplomáticos en la edad media*. Zaragoza.

153 John J. Norwich. 2011. *The Popes. A History*. London: Chatto & Windus: 164–173; J. Doran & D.J. Smith (ed.) 2008. *Pope Celestine III (1191–1198) Diplomat and Pastor*. Ashgate.

154 Cc, Vol. 11, 818–819.

155 DN VI, nr. 5.

Birger Brosa and the Swedish and the Danish kings to work together to defend the Church and fight against King Sverre.¹⁵⁶ Two years later, he also wrote to Archbishop Herbert of Canterbury, telling him to break off contact with Sverre.¹⁵⁷ The rhetoric used to name Sverre in these documents clearly shows an escalation in the conflict. King Sverre is referred as “apostate who by his achievements is an enemy of God and the Church,” “the monster,” “Satan’s instrument,” “the oppressor of the poor and of the Church.”¹⁵⁸ The rhetoric of demonization was the Church’s strategy to quarantine Sverre in the Northern political landscape. It also aimed at destabilizing the king within his own kingdom. Soon the threat of excommunication against all who supported Sverre was to reveal its effect. The bishops started to abandon their king and one by one fled to Lund to join their archbishop.¹⁵⁹

Although we have only little evidence, it appears clear that the respective propaganda campaigns of the Church and of the king used the public space. Like Archbishop Eirik who proclaimed the excommunication against Sverre from the church of Lund, sermons delivered from the pulpit served clerics to spread their propaganda. For its part, Sverre’s party probably also used public orations to defend the cause of the king. Strangely enough, *Sverris saga* only tells or reproduces speeches against the Church to a limited extent. The sole instance is the speech against Bishop Nicholas, which is a personal attack and not an argument against the Church *per se*. The absence of anticlerical speeches in *Sverris saga* most probably does not reflect reality, but must be interpreted in the context of the writing of the saga. After 1202 and the agreement between the clergy and King Magnus Sverresson, the tensions between the two powers eased greatly. Although *Sverris saga* most certainly was the Birkebeiners’ propaganda, the author had no interest in reviving the poisonous political climate under Sverre, which led him to censure many episodes of the conflict and maybe speeches in particular.

As noted above, the main vector for propaganda was the production and diffusion of letters. On the clerical side, the conflict generated an epistolary traffic between 1194 and 1204 which, judging by the corpus of letters from the papacy extant (8) was extensive. The popes initiated a letter-writing campaign spreading their excommunication of the Norwegian king beyond the borders of the Norwegian realm to include most neighboring countries (4). In

156 DN VI, nr. 7^a, c, d.

157 DN XVII, nr. 1233.

158 *apostate, deo et sanctis eius pro suis actibus inimico* (DN VI, nr. 5), *monstrum, membrum illud diaboli* (DN VI, nr. 7 a, c, d.), *pauperum et ecclesiarum oppressor* (DN XVII, nr. 1233).

159 Helle 1964, 60.

its struggle against Sverre, the Church seems thus to have used its full communication system. Sverre's contribution to all this traffic of letters apparently remained marginal. We know only of the letter he sent to the papacy in 1195. However, there may have been more letters, and not only to Rome. Did not Innocent III forbid the Archbishop of Canterbury to discontinue his relationship with the Norwegian king? The letter mentions presents such as animals given by Sverre. Reason for this can be conjectured. An alliance with such a prestigious prelate may have been useful to Sverre in terms of advice and networks. The accusations of forgery against Sverre also reveal an effort to appropriate the authority conferred by ecclesiastical documents. The making of false letters was a common practice when it came to princely excommunications in the High Middle Ages. On a general level, it reveals an awareness of the weight of the written word in politics. Nonetheless, it also reveals the limits of royal communication, which was strongly dependent on Church production, and the king led his propaganda on premises defined by the Church.

The Church's pre-eminence in communication not only directed the means of communication (writs), but also its content. Sverre's rejoinder to his excommunication and the accusation formulated by the Church could only be counteracted by a thorough argumentation, which resulted in the writing of a masterpiece of Norwegian medieval political literature: *A speech against the bishops*.

A Speech against the Bishops

First and foremost, *A speech against the bishops* was a fitting response to the clerical propaganda directed against King Sverre the preceding years. The epistolary correspondence examined above has brought out two main facets of the protagonists' propaganda: the use of defamatory accusations and of legal arguments. The *Speech against the bishops* reflects this two-part character in the very form of the text as well as in its content. Through one single text, the *Speech* counters clerical attacks by combining harsh and libelous charges with a matter-of-fact and sober argumentation.

On the whole, the *Speech* is profoundly ambivalent. The very title, given to the text in the 18th century, reflects a work which lay between orality and literacy.¹⁶⁰ The *Speech* is written as a speech and, as the author suggests in the

160 The text is apocryphal and when the famous Icelander Árni Magnússon "rediscovered" it in the early eighteenth century he gave it the title, *Oratio contra clerum Norwegiae*. The denomination will be later adopted in almost every edition. See David Brégaint. 2013. "Introduction." In D.Brégaint, S. Coviaux and J.R. Hagland (eds.) *Le Discours Contre les Evêques. Politique et controverse en Norvège vers 1200*. Publications de la Sorbonne: 11–12.

last sentences of his text, was meant to be read out loud.¹⁶¹ However, we will see that at the same time, the text could be used in its written form. This trait makes the *Speech* the perfect epitome of communication in transition between the spoken and the written word. Finally, this ambivalence is to be found in the intended audience. The work can easily be divided into two different parts, each with its respective style and nature of arguments, and each with its specific audience: an introduction, which was suited to be declaimed to an unlearned audience, and the main body of text, which was suited to be read and addressed politically conscious men and women with some degree of learning.¹⁶² Indeed, each part may have been used independently.

A speech against the bishops is the earliest example of political literature in medieval Norway and is quite remarkable. It proves that the communication of the Norwegian kings had reached a decisive step in the late 12th century, which now possessed an intellectual milieu able to formulate a program and an ideology against the Church. Nevertheless, as *Grýla* showed, the progress made by the crown remained within the pre-established framework defined by clerical culture and communication.

Due to the rich history of confrontations between the Norwegian kingship and its clergy throughout the Middle Ages, the text has been related to different periods: the 1280s and the early 14th century when the sole copy extant was produced. Modern scholarship however unanimously traces the making of the text back to the reign of King Sverre and more precisely to the years 1194–1198 during which specific conditions mentioned in the text were valid: the excommunication of the king, the exile of the bishops and the allusion to a dramatic state of rebellion.

The Text

In structural terms *A speech against the bishops* is divided into several sections built upon the model of “classical” orations. It is composed of an *exordium* (pp. 11–10) and *expositio* (pp. 110–333), the *argumentatio* (pp. 333–209) that constitutes the main body of the text, and a conclusion or *peroratio* (pp. 209–35).¹⁶³ If we disregard the two short sections of the *exordium* and of the *peroratio*, which respectively state the purpose of the text and summarize the line of arguments, the core of the *Speech* is composed of two main parts, most usual

161 HO 20. 20–21.

162 Mortensen 2000b, 151–152; Gunnes 1971, 318–366; Melve 2001, 139–140.

163 Knirk 1981, 201–203; Byrge Breiteig. 1966a. *Studier i “En tale mot biskopene.”* Trondheim: 3–5.

structure in Old Norse orations:¹⁶⁴ the *expositio* in which the author describes the country's situation by means of a metaphor, and the *argumentatio*, a lengthy argumentation illustrated with quotations from Canon law and from the scriptures.

In the following we will analyze these two parts independently and argue that they played two different roles in the propaganda against the Church. In particular we will suggest that the structure of the *Speech* may have had an effect on the intended audience. For although earlier scholarship unanimously acknowledges the double nature of the *Speech's* audience – learned and unlearned – it has largely failed to determine how the author and its argumentation reached these groups.¹⁶⁵

The first section corresponds approximately to a sixth part of the whole text, and is a remarkable piece of subversive propaganda. It starts with a general and brief invocation of God. From the very first sentences, however, the author sets the tone of the whole section, which is rather dramatic. The country is ravaged by a great sickness (*mykíll fjúkleikr*) and is losing its Christianity (*hafium glatat þúi er kriftni*).¹⁶⁶ He then explains that his purpose is to “lead the people to understand whence comes that loss which has befallen us.”¹⁶⁷ The author thus is here to point out culprits, who are named immediately: “those who are our teachers, and ought to lead us to a right belief,” that is, the Church.¹⁶⁸ Worst of all, the Church is also guilty of making unfair accusations against the king and his men, claiming that they are responsible for the situation.

Then the author begins to demonstrate the nature and extent of the clergy's responsibility for the current state of the kingdom. In order to achieve this, he uses the literary device of the metaphor. Society is compared to the human body. Through this stylistic procedure the author correlates each member or organ of the body with a specific social group, and attributes a corresponding function to them. Thus the ecclesiastic hierarchy is identified as the different organs of the head: the bishops are the eyes, who show the right path and avoid the roads of perdition. Archdeacons are the nose, which smells the “the perfume of righteousness and sacred truth.”¹⁶⁹ The tongue and the lips are the priests who teach correct conduct. The regular clergy is also mentioned as the

164 Knirk 1981, 51–56.

165 Gunnes 1971, 342–352; Melve 2001, 139–140; Knirk 1981, 201–203.

166 *HO* 1. 3, 7.

167 *þýni huadan þat tion kæmr er aat tion værd* (*HO* 1. 8).

168 *varer lærefædr ero ok þeir er offþkilldu leida till retrrar truar* (*HO* 1. 9–10).

169 *ylma allan sætleik ok heilagar truar* (*HO* 1. 16–17).

belly and bowels, where they digest the food for the body. The lay orders are identified with the rest of the body. The heart and chest are the kings who defend the body. The back, shoulders, arms and hands respectively are the princes, royal officers, knights and warriors who also contribute to the protection of society. Lastly, legs and feet are equated with the farmers who, through their work, make the body stand.¹⁷⁰

The allegory of the body appropriately illustrates the gravity of the clergy's errors. Society as described through the allegory is made up of different parts, each having a specific role to fulfill. As long as these parts do what is expected of them, society, like the body, works harmoniously. However, if a single part is deficient and fails to function, the entire society suffers! This is precisely the argument made by the author: the country is plunged into chaos because the clergy has betrayed its function. The eyes are blind. The nose cannot smell anything but stench. The ears no longer hear properly.

The author thereafter starts his relentless attack against the clergy, mainly against the deficient morals of its members. Illustrated with excerpts from the scriptures, in a crescendo of accusations, the clergy is portrayed as violent, simoniacal, a bunch of robbers and Nicolaitans. Worst, this perverted clergy commits the supreme iniquity of raising armies against its own people to steal from them, inciting them to murder and spreading lies.

Stakes of Propaganda

The violence of the accusations makes the introduction an aggressive piece of propaganda totally committed to the destruction of ecclesiastic opposition. It was intended as a counter-attack to the Church's propaganda, which had indulged in a systematic demonization of Sverre. Apostate priest but also killer of a king anointed by the grace of God, Sverre had alienated a large part of the kingdom's Christian population. The king's excommunication and most probably the interdict cast upon the kingdom did not make things better. Although excommunication was an individual punishment that solely affected the king, it considerably aggravated the situation. The interdict was a collective punishment which intimately affected the population's everyday life. The prohibition for the local clergy to celebrate mass and to give the sacraments placed all Christians at risk of damnation. Such a prospect must have generated fear and what we might call "irrational" reactions. Logically, Sverre would be designated as the main person responsible for the people's misfortune. In labeling the clergy as the source of all ills, the *Speech* aimed at winning back popular support.

¹⁷⁰ HO 1. 17 to 2. 7.

Popular support was a crucial issue for Sverre because it had a direct military aim. The successful rebellion of the Baglers put Sverre in a difficult military situation, which traditionally had been his main strength. Sverre had largely built his popularity on his image of the victorious war leader. In emphasizing his courage and his strategic intelligence, he thwarted the negative image his enemies had spread about him.¹⁷¹ In contrast to western societies, popular militia constituted the main military force of the kingdom. The *leiðangr* was a military levy composed of free farmers called up from the districts.¹⁷² The success of the Baglers made the support of the popular militia imperative to win back the ground lost.

Sverris saga reports how the king encountered difficulties with the levy in the midst of the war against the Baglers. In the winter of 1197, King Sverre held an assembly with the levies from Trondelag, Hålogaland, Møre and Romsdal. In his address, Sverre admonished his troops for their lack of discipline. In his argumentation however, it comes clear that it is his authority as king that is at stake; his warnings had not been respected. More interesting is the fact that Bishop Nicholas and his disbelief in Sverre's legitimacy are mentioned in the speech. The king advises his men not to take notice of Nicholas's judgment as he is "glib of tongue, he seems to me to have the heart of a hare, and the falseness of a fox."¹⁷³ King Sverre thus faced growing skepticism regarding his legitimacy within his own troops; a phenomenon that was probably influenced by the Baglers' propaganda.

We see that King Sverre had to face growing internal skepticism and even opposition as well as the treachery of entire regions. The theme developed in the introduction, the stigmatization of the clergy, was meant to rebuild the king's legitimacy among the population. This propaganda of agitation was particularly suited to the lower and uneducated classes of society. It appealed to elementary sentiments and violent emotions, such as hate, requiring no intellectual process. It aims at awakening passionate behavior and provoking violent reactions.¹⁷⁴

Allegory, a "speaking" Model

The anthropomorphic analogy in the introduction of the Speech also appears to be a particularly appropriate tool for the author to reach the masses. True, the identification of society with the human body essentially has come to us as

171 Bagge 1996, 20–51.

172 «Leidang» by Halvard Bjørkvik, *KLNM* Vol. X: 432–442.

173 *Nicolaffe tungufniallr maðr fem hann hafi hera hiarta* (SvS, Ch. 133).

174 Ellul 1973, 70–74.

part of written culture. The comparison is present in the Old Testament, but is also used by Roman authors such as Livy, who were very popular in the Middle Ages.¹⁷⁵ In the 11th and 12th century, the corporal conception of society was revived and is known particularly from two treatises of philosophical and political science: *Elucidarius* by Honorius of Autun (c. 1098) and John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (c. 1159). Indeed, *Elucidarius* was widely used in Christian education in the North and was even translated into Old Norse sometime in the late 12th century, that is, contemporary to the *Speech*.¹⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the metaphor was limited neither to a scholarly written culture nor to a literate audience. Indeed we also find the allegory in various types of documents aimed at very different audiences. Thus in Norway we find the allegory in the foundation letter of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1154, where the Church is compared to the human body and its author lists the general principles ruling it.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, in a letter from Pope Innocent III to the bishops of Iceland written in 1198, more or less at the same time as the *Speech*, it is said that the different churches are related to Rome like a body to the head.¹⁷⁸ Of course these writs were addressed to a learned audience of clerics, but there are examples where the analogy is present in charters intended for another type of audience, an elite who might well have been learned in Latin: merchants. Thus in his letter to Gothland merchants (c. 1177), the Danish King Valdemar I stressed that "as God, almighty leader, has organized all parts of the body with different offices under one head, he similarly ascribed specific task of different art to people at specific times, like with those who deal with trade, with those who strive in the fields."¹⁷⁹

More remarkably, the analogy of the body is attested in a medium which manifestly was meant to reach the masses. A German sermon from the second half of the 12th century includes an anthropomorphic analogy remarkably similar to the one we find in the *Speech*, and which according to Gunnes may well have served as a model for our author.¹⁸⁰ In the context of orality, the

175 Respectively, 1 Corinthians 12: 12–31, and Tite – Live, *History of Rome*, II, 32.

176 Firchow & Grimstad. 1989. *Elucidarius: in Old Norse translation. Stofnun Arna Magnussonar*; Byrge Breiteig. 1966b. "Elucidarius og kong Sverrir." *Maal og Minne*, Oslo: 22–34.

177 LD, nr. 8 52.

178 DN VI, nr. 5.

179 *Sed quia deus cunctorum gubernator sicut uni capiti diuersorum officiorum distinxit membra, sic uaritate rerum ac temporum determinauit negotia gentium, igitur, siue mercimoniarum negotiis laborantibus, siue agriculturis desudantibus.* (Danmarks Gilde og lavsskraaer fra Middelalderen. Vol 1. Ed. C.Nyrop. Copenhagen 1900: 3).

180 Gunnes 1971, 367–71.

anthropomorphic analogy was a figure of speech particularly appropriate for reaching an illiterate audience. Indeed the proper function of a metaphor is to express abstract notions and concepts in a more “visual” way to render them more comprehensible. The identification of society with the human body and the equation of political unrest with a disease made the author’s views and arguments easy to grasp. The image of the body and of sickness “spoke” in a simple and concrete manner while simultaneously integrating a multitude of concepts and values. In our author’s mind however, this metaphor aimed less at offering the reader a model of society in which he/she could find his/her place than at pointing to the culprit responsible for society’s malfunctioning.

“Great Injury to the King and to all the People”:¹⁸¹ Identification

In his attempt to regain the favor of the population, the author also relies on the principle of identification. This procedure is recurrent throughout the text, but dominates in the introduction.

In his depiction of the terrible situation that has befallen the kingdom, the author uses the first person vi/off/vars: *land vart*, “our land,” *ver hafium glatat þui er kristni var*, “we have lost the Christianity that was ours.”¹⁸² The third person is systematically employed in the description of the wrongs and damage perpetrated by the clergy.

Our tithes and charitable offerings are demanded with threats and ban and excommunication. **W**e are urged to build churches, and when they are built **w**e are driven from them like heathens. **W**e are urged to undertake the cost, but are given no rule over them. [...] **W**e are deprived of some of **o**ur property with the sanction of the law; but where the law fails to apply, it is taken unjustly and by laying charges against **u**s; [...] These are the gifts and presents brought to **u**s in return for **o**ur tithes and other property.¹⁸³

181 *konongenum j þui ok sua allu folke mykin skada* (HO 3. 32).

182 HO 2. 32 and HO 1. 7.

183 *Mer erom krafder tiunda vara ok annara godgærninga mædr hotan ok mædr banne ok stormælom. Mer erom till þrøngder kirkiur vp at gera en sidan gorfuar værda. Þa erom ver fra ræknir sæm heidnir menn. Mer erom till þrøngder at hafua kostnad firir en eigi forræde. [...] Fiarlutir varer sumir værda af oss tæknir mædr rettyndum, en þægar er þrytr, þa skall komazst aat fe varo mædr sakar giftum ok rangyndum. [...] Ok ero þær giæfuer ok sendengar oss mote fluttar tiundum varom ok adrær fearlutum varom* (HO 2. 24–34) (My emphasis).

Later in a summarizing paragraph, the author more explicitly associates the king with the people: the bishops have “done great injury to the King and to all the people.”¹⁸⁴ Through this procedure, the author aims to associate the audience with the king and to show that both the king and the people are victims of the clergy. In making common cause with the people, the *Speech* portrays King Sverre not only as defending his person and his title. He becomes the defender of all those who suffer, the protector of the people against injustice and lies.

The *Sverris saga* shows that King Sverre was accustomed to this procedure. As we mentioned earlier, his battle speeches readily enhanced his solidarity with his men in order to strengthen their loyalty and boost their morale before battles. King Sverre appears to have excelled in emphasizing an intimate bond with the people. Notwithstanding the fact that he made his kinship with King Sigurd Munn a fundamental element of his royal legitimacy, Sverre regularly played on his proximity to popular audiences. He was proud of his simple origins, portraying himself as “a little and lowly man from the outlying islands.”¹⁸⁵

Canon Law and Propaganda

The second and main part of the text differs greatly from the introduction and probably aimed at a different use. In contrast to the first part where the author chiefly played on prejudices and stereotypes, in the second part he invokes and bases his argument on no less than 41 quotations from scriptural, canonical and patristic texts.

As mentioned, the *Speech* was an answer to the arguments advanced by the archbishop and the papacy. These arguments appear in two instances in their correspondence, but also were probably developed elsewhere, in sermons for instance. In 1194 and 1198, in line with a long-lasting tradition, Eirik Ivarsson had invoked papal authority to defend and define archiepiscopal rights.¹⁸⁶ Pope Celestine’s and Pope Innocent’s answers were to be the official policy of the archbishops in their struggle against King Sverre. Both letters expressly confirmed the validity of the privileges of the Norwegian Church, the independence of clerical nominations and of jurisdiction, and threatened anyone who would oppose or challenge these rights with excommunication. Backed with the Old Testament, the Church fathers and Gratian’s *Decretum*, our author undertook his response to the accusations of the Church as well as to the clergy’s exigencies. The text is centered on four chief themes: the king’s

184 *konongenum j þui ok sua allu folke mykin fkaða*. (HO 3. 32).

185 *af utferiom ein litinn man oc lagan* (SvS, Ch. 99).

186 Duggan 2011, 23–56.

excommunication, the king's rights and duties, the invalidity of the church's privileges, and the problem of heresy.

The first task of the author was to clear King Sverre of his excommunication. We have seen that the circumstances around this excommunication were unclear; was it the work of Archbishop Eystein or of the pope? The author however endeavors to discharge the pope from this responsibility, representing him as having been fooled by the Norwegian clergy.¹⁸⁷ The author's main aim is to prove the invalidity of the excommunication. His argument is simple and is largely based on Gratian's text: the excommunication is not valid because the king was in the right. Once the attack is deflected, it is turned against its origin. Our author then declares, supported by quotations from *Decretum* that a false excommunication always falls back on those who pronounced it, namely the bishops.¹⁸⁸

The preceding demonstration aimed to respond to direct attacks on the king. It was an answer to a one-off and urgent situation: Sverre's excommunication. But the *Speech* also addressed a deeper issue: the balance of power between the church and the crown, which it aimed to reverse. The *Speech* constituted the cornerstone of King Sverre's struggle for supremacy. The author develops the thesis of the pre-eminence of the temporal power over the Church.

Now, inasmuch as the control and keeping of Holy Church are so bound up in the hands of kings that these have to render an answer and an account to God Himself, it is now necessary to understand what loyalty and worship the clergy ought to afford kings and kingly rule in return for the protection received from them¹⁸⁹

Kings have rights and duties that they have received from God. They are charged with governing and protecting the Christian Church. This duty gives the kingship pre-eminence over the Church, which in return is bound to obey and assist the kings.

This naturally leads the author to question the rights and privileges that the Church claimed the preceding kings, Inge, Eystein and Sigurd who jointly ruled in the 1140s, ceded to them. These rights, which had been later confirmed

187 HO 3, 18–24.

188 HO 5, 26–32.

189 *En mædr þui at stiorn ok gætzsla heilagrar kirkiu ero sua miok bun[d]nar a hondom konongs, at þeir skolo gudi sealfum suor ok skynsæmd firir giællða, þa er þat nu skiliande huern trunad ædr tighn lærder menn eigu konongenom ædr konongdomenom at veita mote þui trausti er þeir taka af honom* (HO 8, 22–26).

under the reign of Magnus Erlingsson, greatly reinforced the jurisdictional, economic autonomy of the Church. Archbishop Eystein had obtained the recognition of the *privilegium fisci* (the prohibition of lay tribunals judging clerics), the control over priestly and episcopal investiture as well as fiscal and military immunities.¹⁹⁰ Behind the questioning of the Church's rights lay the challenging of clerical supremacy. Our author argues that the cession cannot have been legal, since kings are endowed with rights that are an inherent part of the kingship and are inalienable. Thereby, if previous kings did relinquish a part of their authority, this was a mistake and indeed contrary to the commandments established by God.

So far, the author has undertaken a systematic and well-documented prosecution of the Norwegian clergy. The *Speech* concludes in reiterating his charge against the clergy, who are the ones truly responsible for the unrest and the "loss of Christendom" by making false accusations, spreading lies and deceit, and making unacceptable demands. In order to complete his strategy, the author only needs to give the kingship a final and definitive absolution by showing that in history, bishops have been the main if not the sole source of heresy. Many heretical movements are listed, from bishops Annas and Caiaphas who condemned Christ to crucifixion to Donat and Nicholas Advenat. *A contrario* the author argues that kings have always protected the faith and fought heresies and lies.¹⁹¹

The *Speech* followed the line of attack of the papacy and answered, point by point, each of the pope's arguments with its own arguments drawn from Canon law and the Bible. The fact that the initiative of King Sverre was only reactive and that the argumentation of the *Speech* used the Church's law and developed within a framework defined by the Church illustrates the great reliance of royal political literature on ecclesiastical communication.

Quoting and Fooling

In making extensive use of quotations, the author strongly bases his arguments on what constituted the most authoritative corpus of ecclesiastical laws and referential texts of western Christianity: Gratian's *Decretum* and the writings of St. Augustine. In itself it certainly made a strong case for Sverre's supporters and provided them with a ready-made line of arguments that they could use to defend the king's position. However, the *Speech* also relied on another procedure to persuade its audience: manipulation.

190 HO 13. 31 to 18. 24.

191 HO 18. 25 to 20. 9.

The author states that he translated his quotations from Gratian and the Church father in order to make them understandable to all those who did not know Latin.¹⁹² He wished thus to provide his audience with all the means for a complete and fair comprehension of his arguments. These are highly laudable intentions and unsurprising in a man who, according to himself, was dedicated to spreading the whole and complete truth.¹⁹³ He concedes some discrepancies in the translations into Norse, but claims that these are purely stylistic and assures us vehemently that the translation does not alter the correct meaning of the words.¹⁹⁴ However, a thorough examination of some translations raises doubts concerning his apparent honesty. Contrary to his claims, it seems clear that the procedure of translation was not only limited to illustrating his arguments, but played its part in the anticlerical propaganda. In her study on the use of canonical quotations in the *Speech*, Astrid Salvesen has showed strikingly that the author of the *Speech* made biased translations and even forgeries.¹⁹⁵ According to her analysis, around half of the Latin quotations are altered in the Old Norse translations, significantly modifying their meaning. This goes from simple word changes to the addition of a sentence or the complete transformation of the Latin quotation. Some modifications aimed at adapting the quotations to the context. Thus in systematically translating ecclesiastical titles as *biskup*, (bishops), or the neutral *sentencia* (decision) with *bann* (excommunication) the author explicitly pointed to the conflict with the clergy and its involvement/responsibility in it.¹⁹⁶ In the paragraph on royal supremacy over the Church, the author undertakes even greater modifications. Thus, whereas the quotation from Gratian underlines that *Principes seculi non vmquam intra ecclesia potestatis*, "Secular princes hold sometimes the highest office in the church," in the ON translation this "sometimes" becomes *afua at hallda hina hæsto tighn*, "ought to hold the highest rank." In the same passage, whereas the Latin quotation limits this office to *disciplina ecclesiastica muni-ant*, "to guard ecclesiastic discipline," the author enlarges the translation to *gæta kenningar heilagrar kirkiu ok lærengar kristni*, "guard the teachings of Holy Church and the precepts of Christianity." Thus, based on a Latin quotation suggesting a possible authority of the temporal princes over the church for disciplinary issues, the author of the *Speech* uses the translation in Old Norse

192 HO 20. 12–16.

193 *fullz ok viti till fannynda* (HO 20. 14).

194 HO 18. 9–11.

195 Anne Salvesen. 1954–56. "En tale mot biskopene og corpus iuris canonice." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 37, Oslo: 204–224.

196 *Ibid.*, 206.

to increase royal control over the Church.¹⁹⁷ In the discussion of the validity of the clerical privileges and immunities, which the church claims to have received from earlier kings, our author does not hesitate to add new sentences that ascribe a totally new meaning. The quotation from Gratian says,

Sic decet fidem sanctorum partum in ecclesia seruari catholica vt quod habet amittat qui in probabili temeritate quod non accepit asumpserit

which is translated in Old Norse as,

it becomes us so to defend the justice of the Holy Fathers in Holy Church, that whosoever has received any confirmation whereby he reaps advantage, and cannot boldly and manfully show its authenticity, let him lose what he has.¹⁹⁸

The Latin quotation declares that anything acquired wrongfully must be given back. However, in the translation the author has added *han mæge eigi syna mædr skiluislegre dirfd ok menzsko*, “and cannot boldly and manfully show its authenticity.” The Old Norse words thus compel the church to present evidence to prove their acquisition was lawful. Our author thereby makes the church’s privileges conditional on written testimonies which, if they cannot be presented, annul the donations.¹⁹⁹

A Section Addressing the Clergy

If the *Speech* was a response to the arguments of the papacy, we still do not know how papal propaganda reached its audience in Norway and thus motivated the refutation developed in the pamphlet. The arguments of Innocent III are known to us from the two aforementioned letters of 1194 and 1198, which originally responded to the archbishop’s request. But how were these arguments used and diffused? Were the letters of the pope read out loud during sermons in churches? Were these copied and spread? Was the argumentation re-used in other texts? It seems quite evident that the *Speech*’s and the pope’s propaganda aimed at a similar audience and developed in the same space.

197 *Ibid.*, 209.

198 *Sua byriar at vardueita retlæte heilagra fædra j heilagre kirkiu at sa ein huar er sealfuer hæfuir vptækit till nokorar nytsemdar einahueria stadfæstu er han mæge eigi syna mædr skiluislegre dirfd ok menzsko þa lata han þat allt er han hæfuir* (HO 17. 32–35).

199 Salvesen 1954–56, 219–220.

It is quite obvious that the second part of the *Speech* is not as suited to public propaganda as the first one. First, the extensive use of lengthy Latin quotations and their translations into the vernacular is hardly suited to declamation to large audiences in the open. Rather, the text better fitted indoor individual or group readings. It addressed an audience willing to examine with greater attention the legal foundations of the disagreement between the church and the crown, and in particular the king's juridical arguments. We can imagine that the text was handled directly, coming under the direct visual examination of the reader who would go back and forward in the text. As a reservoir of arguments, the *Speech* could also have been used in discussions and debates, the participants reading out loud the paragraphs discussed. It supplied supporters with ready-made arguments. As such, the second part of the *Speech* resembled a political treatise more than a firebrand meant to cast opprobrium on the clergy.

Moreover, although the Latin quotations were systematically translated into Old Norse and thereby technically accessible to a broad audience, the themes developed and the argumentation employed probably did not appeal to the people. It is clear that the text was rather addressed to the audience supposed to be best acquainted with Canon law and the scriptures: the clergy. In the themes discussed, the *Speech* addressed the Church. The issues of patronage and church privileges, as well as the moral condemnation of the clergy, concerned Norwegian clerics first and foremost. The nature and the origin of the arguments used in the text also primarily affected churchmen. Moreover, the translation of the quotations into Norse may also point to a clerical audience. The level of Latin knowledge varied highly among clerics. The lower clergy in particular, priests and deacons, often were unable to read Latin apart from a few words used in rituals. The *Laurentius saga Biskup*, which recounts the life of the bishop of Hólar in Iceland (1267–1331), reports of the frequent need within the church to have Latin texts translated into Norse.²⁰⁰

If we agree with the view that the quotations from Gratian and the Holy Scriptures were given a conscious bias by the author, we can imagine that the Norse translations were in fact aimed at the local lower clergy, probably the less educated group within the Norwegian Church. The subtlety of the biased translations however was too high for clerics with limited knowledge in Latin to discern propaganda. As Ellul argued, “the uncultured man cannot be reached by propaganda” and “a certain cultural level [is required] to make people

200 *Lsb*, Ch. 14.

susceptible to propaganda.”²⁰¹ Because clerics had some culture and education, they potentially constituted ideal prey for royal propaganda. Cultural prestige led them to more easily accept the arguments which were presented to them uncritically, and thereby to contribute to the dissemination of royal propaganda.

If the author had the clergy in mind, there is also evidence that the themes developed in the second part reached another audience; the king’s own party. It is striking that we can detect in *Sverris saga* direct references to central themes of the *Speech* on several occasions, which may evidence the text’s immediate impact. These occurrences are located in speeches, mainly by Birkebeiners, and tend to portray the Baglers as the truly excommunicated ones. Thus, as early as in 1194, responding to the news of his excommunication, Sverre held a speech in which he declared that “those who do the work of banning will fall under ban” which echoed the argument developed in the *Speech* that a false excommunication always fell back on the one who pronounced it.²⁰² This instance is interesting as it may indicate that the *Speech* may have been already written at that date, but we can also interpret this declaration as an early instance of what would be Sverre’s strategy in dealing with his excommunication. The theme was indeed later developed and, as we get closer to the supposed date the *Speech* was written, the probability that it was the result of reading pamphlet grows stronger. During an encounter between King Sverre and Bishop Nicholas in 1196, the Birkebeiners retorted in response to Nicholas’ provocations, “You will carry your weapons to your own hurt, as you have done in the past.”²⁰³ The theme recurs in the year 1198. Celebrating a victory over the Birkebeiners in Bergen in the summer of 1198, the Baglers composed a verse that was parodied by the vanquished and which included “The Baglers all are under ban.”²⁰⁴ Finally, the saga reports in detail Thorstein Kugad’s dramatic shift of allegiance in Bergen the same summer. Thorstein left the Baglers to join the Birkebeiners. He begged Sverre for mercy and slandered his earlier party, calling them “robbers and evil-doers.”²⁰⁵ He said Nicholas was a false bishop who “blinded” him.²⁰⁶ As for the Baglers, “under ban they are, and deserving it.”²⁰⁷

201 Ellul 1973, 109–110.

202 *Munu þeir I banni vera er banz-verc gera.* (SvS, Ch. 121).

203 *Jlla munntu bera þin vapn fva hefir þu fyr borit* (SvS, Ch. 131).

204 *Baglar ftanda I banni allir* (SvS, Ch. 153).

205 *ranfmen oc illgerða* (*Ibid.*).

206 *Villu-byscup gerði mic sva øran oc blindan* (*Ibid.*).

207 *Þeim diofulf-monnum Boglum er bannfettir ero oc þeir fanliga verðir* (*Ibid.*).

5 Evidence of a Royal Intellectual Milieu

Apparently, King Sverre counted among the ranks of his followers a capable polemicist who was able to hold a strict line of argument and was sufficiently comfortable with the arguments presented to manipulate them in his favor. But who was this master of propaganda? It is impossible to identify the author precisely. Although most theories consider a single author, we cannot exclude the possibility that the work was collegial. Based on her philological analysis, Anne Holtsmark identifies a single author, but many persons may have been involved earlier in the writing process.²⁰⁸ Indeed, in the preceding examination we have pointed to a significant difference in style in the text, which could indicate that the redaction of the *Speech* was a process involving at least two authors. Two elements allow us to affirm that our author was either Norwegian or at least of northern origin. First, rather obviously, the *Speech* was written in the vernacular, Old Norse. At the end of the *Speech*, the author writes about the reasons why he translated Latin quotations into *varar tungu*, “into our tongue,” Old Norse.²⁰⁹

The expertise in Canon law however constitutes the main clue to the origin of our author(s). This expertise points to connections abroad.²¹⁰ Clerics were probably the most itinerant population of Europe and it was not uncommon that a cleric was born in one country, received his education in another one and was entrusted with an office in a third place. Gunnes believed that the author of the *Speech* had connections with the court of the English king Henry II and the German court of Frederick Barbarossa, which were the leading centers of anticlerical propaganda.²¹¹ However, our author did not need to have found inspiration in milieus making polemical use of Canon law to write the *Speech*. An education as a Decretist was in fact the sole prerequisite. The greatest universities in Canon law were Bologna, Paris and Oxford. It is conceivable that our author belonged to the contingents of Scandinavian students that went abroad to study at these universities.²¹² In this respect, we have already underlined the privileged connection between Paris and Nidaros and the deep involvement of English clerics in the Norwegian Church. Whoever the author(s) of the *Speech* was/were, he/they developed an argumentation which matched

²⁰⁸ Holtsmark 1931: 55 ff.

²⁰⁹ *HO* 20. 13.

²¹⁰ Iversen 2011.

²¹¹ Gunnes 1971, 352.

²¹² Sverre Bagge. 1984. “Nordic students at foreign universities until 1660.” *Scandinavian Journal of History* Vol. 9, Issue 1: 1–29.

the work of papal intellectuals, and excelled in applying canonistic knowledge to the local context.

The extreme degree of partisanship implied in the very nature of the pamphlet advocates a very intimate connection between the writer(s) and King Sverre. Somehow the author(s) must have been part of the King's direct circle. Earlier scholarship readily conceived that Sverre had been personally involved in the writing. According to Bugge, the monarch was "the real master behind the book."²¹³ He even detected "both his [Sverre's] pathos and his irony" in the *Speech*...²¹⁴ Although Sverre certainly was acquainted with some basics of Canon law from his priestly education, the quality of the canonistic argumentation and the level of learning rather point to a cleric or group of clerics from his closest circle. As in the case of *Grýla*, although one person was in charge of the writing, King Sverre supervised the whole. Every cleric known to have belonged to Sverre's court has been proposed as author of the pamphlet. Sverre's chaplains, Richard, Martin, Ivar Bodde and Einar all potentially possessed enough knowledge and not least the loyalty to their master to have authored the text.²¹⁵

Royal communication was largely centered on the person of King Sverre. In the absence of clear evidence, the scholarship almost always more or less closely implicates King Sverre in every aspect of communication, and in particular in the authorship of literary propaganda. Yet, as we have now seen, the king was not alone. While his education qualified him for active participation in the authoring of letters and texts, he also relied on people and a certain milieu to carry out his propaganda. What was this milieu?

The first element would be the court. We know little about the royal court before the early 13th century. The *Hirðskrá* (1274) refers to an early law "forn hirðskrá," for the king's personal retinue, which is believed to date from the time of King Sverre.²¹⁶ We do not know exactly which elements predated the law written under King Magnus the Lawmender, but as the *Hirðskrá* contains many regulations concerning life at court, we can assume that a "court" in the sense of a both materially and conceptually defined environment existed under Sverre. Sverre's rule certainly remained itinerant. But based on the saga it also seems clear that Sverre seldom sojourned outside towns and remained

213 Alexander Bugge et al. 1910. *Norges Historie Fremstillet for Det Norske Folk*. Kristiania: Aschehoug, Vol. II/2: 200.

214 Bugge A., *Norsk Litteratur*, Vol. I: 466.

215 Gunnes 1971, 349.

216 Steinar Imsen. 2000. *Hirdloven til Norges konge og hans håndgangne men*. Oslo: Riksarkivet: 25.

there for long periods, particularly in winter. The towns of Nidaros and Bergen constituted the king's privileged residences. We know little about the royal palaces in these towns in the 12th century and whether the kings made any changes. In Nidaros, the royal palace had been relocated frequently to find its definitive location east of the Cathedral in the late 11th century.²¹⁷ In Bergen, King Sverre had a fort with stones built close to the royal palace on Holmen shortly after his victory in 1184. We do not know the size of the royal palace that existed there before the program of construction initiated under King Håkon Håkonsson in the 13th century.²¹⁸

King Sverre thus possessed the physical foundations necessary for a semi-settled government. Despite this, Sverre's central administration remained embryonic and his administrative personnel most probably continued to follow the king on his travels. It should be noted too that the political context did not lend itself to the development of a permanent location for royal government. Wars and revolts were a permanent feature of Sverre's reign. Towns could be taken by rebels and force the king and his men to flee to other places, as in Easter 1198 when the Baglers conquered Bergen.²¹⁹

In spite of this we have evidence that the royal court developed into a specific space for royal communication and a space for the king to exhibit his power and authority. The wish of King Sverre to be presented dead on his throne provides a good illustration of the function of the royal residence as a ceremonial space. The hall of the royal throne was a central element in the visual communication between the king and his men, but also, as the saga suggests, a broader audience that could even include his enemies. However, the role of the royal residence was not the only space used in Sverre's communication. His political pragmatism made him use the burial of his enemies in churches for his propaganda, and clerical buildings continued to play a significant role on other occasions. For instance, the dramatic parody of judgment of Earl Maddadsson in 1195 was orchestrated not in the royal palace, but within the precinct of Christ Church's yard. During the ceremony, the royal throne was a central element in the staging of the king's display. To some extent we can readily interpret the translation of the king's high seat into the space of the church as a phenomenon similar to the translation of relics to the space of the *þing* (see 1, 2). In both cases the symbolic value of the throne and of the reliquary favored the "domestication" of foreign ground.

217 Lunde 1977, 197–207.

218 Helle 1982, 544–546.

219 SvS, Ch. 149.

The court of the king was also a center for written production. The campaign of epistolary propaganda which reached its height in the late 1190s provides clear evidence of the existence of a literate milieu around King Sverre. The state of development of the royal chancery is virtually unknown to us before the mid-13th century. Many elements were probably in place for the functioning of a chancery. The Chronicle of William of Newburgh refers to the existence of Sverre's seal.²²⁰ We know too that King Sverre used clerics as chaplains, advisors and to perform central administrative tasks. The only surviving evidence we have though is a list of names: Richard Blackmaster, an English Benedictine monk; Martin, also of English origin, who was Sverre's chaplain until 1184 when he was made Bishop of Bergen by Sverre himself. From 1199 onwards, a Norwegian, Ivar Bodde, became one of Sverre's most prominent advisors. His written skills would later make him the first "chancellor" of King Inge Bårdsson. Finally there is Einar, a priest at the court, who died in 1205. All these men had the literary skills necessary to support King Sverre's written communication in the production of charters and letters. All these men have also been proposed in turn as possible authors of the anonymous *Speech against the bishops*.²²¹ The English origin of two of Sverre's "chancellors" can be interpreted both as a sign of the lack of local competency and as a manifestation of Sverre's problem in finding loyal clerics among the local clergy. We do not know whether Sverre made Richard and Martin come to Norway or whether he found them in Norway in the monasteries or other clerical institutions, which were full of foreigners, but the reliance on outsiders is a central trait in King Sverre's written communication system. In order to write his biographical tale, King Sverre employed none other than an Icelander, Abbot Karl. Karl's origin was advantageous in many respects, first as Icelanders were then the most prominent writers of sagas. Karl came from the abbey of Þingeyrar, Iceland's most important literary center. But as he came from a remote part of the archiepiscopal province, Karl probably was also removed from the factions' rivalry.

King Sverre was thus surrounded by literate scholars of various origins. Neither Bergen nor Nidaros seem to have been dominant as Sverre's cultural center. The presence of English clerics – Richard and Martin – at court may point to the importance of Bergen. The town had extensive economic contacts with England, which also could have been associated with significant cultural exchange. Bergen also had in its surroundings a Cistercian monastery, Saint-Mary at Lyse, served by several English monks, which was a sister-house of the

220 *Hra*, Ch. VI, p. 232.

221 Holtsmark 1931, 55–63.

English Fountains Abbey.²²² The English connection did not disqualify Nidaros however. On the contrary, England and Englishmen had played a decisive role in the very foundation of the independent Norwegian Church with Nidaros as its metropolitan head. Under Archbishop Eystein Erlendsson the contacts flourished. Nidaros enjoyed privileged trade relations with England as “the archbishop and his successors, every year, whether fertile or not, loaded one ship with corn and provisions, without challenge or exaction, and took it to Norway to his church.”²²³

6 Conclusion

The reign of King Sverre clearly stands out as the determining stage in the development of royal communication. For the first time in medieval Norway, the crown actively used communication as an instrument to consolidate royal power. As discussed in Part I, prior to this, in the wake of the establishment of the ecclesiastical province of Nidaros, the Church had introduced a new legitimizing ideology of rulership and new means to display it (crowning of 1163, law of succession, historiographies). These elements however placed the Church in a position of power as the necessary intercessor between God and society and as the seat of knowledge and competency. Facing strong opposition to his rule, King Sverre personally took the lead in the development of royal propaganda.

Judging by the sagas, King Sverre was a great orator and a talented performer who grasped every opportunity to bolster his propaganda. His coronation in 1194 and the burials of his enemies epitomize his aptitude for taking control over his communication when his political ambitions commanded it. Sverre's most remarkable contribution lies however in the field of literature. It appears clear that King Sverre participated personally in the writing of two masterpieces of royal literature both as a patron and directly taking part in the writing process. On the whole, his literary activity was groundbreaking and inaugurated a grand tradition of literary Norwegian monarchs.

The use of written communication, beyond the simple change of media, necessitated other qualities and implied radical changes in the structure of the production of communication. Although King Sverre was directly involved in the drafting of histories and political treaties, the progress of the Norwegian

222 H.G. Leach. 1921. *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 85 ff.

223 *Ibid.*, 96–97.

crown in the field of written communication could not have been accomplished without the assistance of a new type of “follower” in the king’s entourage. At a time when literacy was the privilege of a few, writing implied the existence of professionals who had mastered the art of the written word. The preceding analysis suggests the formation of an arena of communication around the person of the king, a space where communication was produced by writers who worked with the king, but which also functioned as an environment for symbolic display where the king made demonstration of his authority. However, the existence of a courtly center of culture *in sui generis* appears to have been embryonic and under-developed. The production of royal communication rather developed in a landscape of multiple and decentralized centers of culture scattered across the kingdom of Norway within the wider framework of the ecclesiastical province of Nidaros. Most of these centers, if not all, were urban and clerical. Monastic scriptoria and the learned personnel of the bishop’s cathedrals supplied their competency and know-how in writing, Canon law and literary knowledge to the crown.

Although this communication landscape was fragmented and split, the ambulatory character of royal government enabled its exploitation by the kingship. While scholarship has systematically approached the phenomenon of *Veitzla* as a means of satisfying the economic needs of the crown, it also appears clear that had a great impact on the production of communication. The king and his followers were constantly on the move throughout a network centered on a handful of towns in the kingdom: Nidaros, Bergen, Tønsberg, Oslo and Konghelle. Each visit allowed the king to use the respective town’s intellectual and cultural resources for the promotion of royal policies, and also provided the largest audience for royal communication and propaganda at a time when the necessity of winning the support of the populace was a crucial issue.

Our understanding of the reception of communication is limited by the source situation. The profusion of public speeches in *Sverris saga* and the themes conveyed therein suggest that Sverre’s communication was predominantly addressed to a popular audience. Sverre’s written propaganda seems to have reached both a literate and an illiterate audience simultaneously. In his anticlerical propaganda, King Sverre initiated an epistolary and literary production that developed within a context of orality and visual communication. Some elements favored a broad reception whereas others directly addressed an enlightened audience. The fact that the crown’s literary production was written in the vernacular suggests the existence of a lay literate audience. Lastly, the preceding analysis has emphasized the pivotal role of war in the making of a royal communication system. King Sverre’s pressing need to

legitimize his authority led him to undertake intense propagandistic activity against his enemies. While our documentary sources fail to show how this activity was answered by his lay competitors, they clearly point out the Church as Sverre's main rival in the field of political communication. Earlier scholarship has firmly established how decisive the conflicts between the *regnum* and *sacerdotium* were in the development of political thought and doctrine in the 11th and 12th century. The example of Norway illustrates that this also had major implications in the development of a communication system as a whole.

The conflict encouraged the emancipation of the crown from the tutelage of ecclesiastical institutions. This emancipation however was political more than cultural. The king's efforts to create a system to elaborate and promote justifications for his actions and claims ran up against major practical constraints. The domination of the Church in the field of symbolic legitimization – means, locations, rhetoric – was far too great. Although the kingship developed an antagonistic discourse, it had no alternative other than to form and integrate it into the communication system of the Church. Some transfers of competency can be perceived nonetheless, notably in the field of written communication and in the cautious formation of a royal ideology. These were to form the breeding ground for the development of original and dynamic intellectual activity in the following century.

Monarchic Communication

1 Introduction

The third and last part of this study addresses royal communication from the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson (1217–1263) to roughly the turn of the 14th century. The period was pivotal in the consolidation of royal power in Norway. The century was still shaken by the last convulsions of the civil war which had ended with the death of Duke Skule (1240), the last rebel against the authority of a royal dynasty that was taking root in Norway for good. With the return of internal peace, King Håkon Håkonsson (1217–1263) and his heirs strengthened royal authority over the Norwegian realm, developing the political-administrative organization, monopolizing resource extraction, justice and the control of coercive means of power, and thus greatly accelerating the Norwegian process of state formation. Finally, the organization of the *hirð* and the reserve of the Church leaders fortified royal ascendancy over the lay and ecclesiastic aristocracies. The extent of royal power by the mid-13th century greatly exceeded what Norwegian kings had ruled over so far. The end of the war reunified mainland Norway under the yoke of a single king. Moreover, with the end of internal strife, 13th-century kings developed both diplomatic contacts and greater ambition in terms of conquest, completing their domination of North Sea territories with the integration of Iceland (1264) and the settlements of Greenland (1263) to create the greatest thalassocracy of its time.¹

The consolidation of royal power in the 13th century was also realized in the field of communication with the development of a communication system that more largely involved the kingship both in its form and its aims. The process continued developments that had started under King Sverre towards the appropriation and exploitation of means of communication in the kings' service. The progress of royal control developed in intimate connection with

1 For a survey about the state-formation process in Norway in the 13th century, see Bagge 2010a; Bagge 1986, 145–197; Helle 1964; Helle 2003a, 369–391; About the relationship between the Norwegian monarchy and the Church see, Eljas Orrman. 2003. “Church and society.” in Knut Helle (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia. Vol. 1. Prehistory to 1520*. Cambridge University Press: 446–448. About the extension of royal control over overseas territories see, Wærdahl 2012.

the lay aristocracy and the Church. Much of the royal communication concerned the lay aristocracy, which was as much a target for communication as an active contributor. Finally, the development of a royal sub-system of communication inevitably led to a redefinition of the relationship between the crown and the Church. Ecclesiastic control and ascendancy over communication was challenged through the appropriation of means and *loci* of communication. In this and the following chapters, we will look at how royal commitment was polarized on two axes in particular: court and courtly culture and political rituals.

2 Communication at Court: Royal Court and Courtly Culture

Falconry was one of the most popular leisure activities of medieval princes and a recurrent topic of courtly codes.² Taming and using this suspicious raptor for hunting required patience and a large and experienced staff. It is tempting here to find an analogy to the enterprise of control over aristocratic violence which unfolded in 12th and 13th century Europe.³ Norwegian kings had falcons too. We do know that they sold them to foreign courts or offered them as gifts.⁴ We have no references however that suggest they hunted with falcons. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that in the 13th century, Norwegian kings thoroughly endeavored to strengthen their hold over their aristocracy. From the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson onwards, control over the aristocracy was to become a chief element in the consolidation of royal power. It was also to be a decisive impetus in the development of royal communication, increasing royal commitment to the written word and appropriation over *loci* of communication.

This chapter seeks to examine the role of the royal court and of courtly culture in the communication of kings in the 13th century. During this period, the royal court developed significantly to become the meeting place of the king and the lay aristocracy and the frame for dialogue between them. However, this dialogue was not symmetric. The court was an arena under royal control and the exchanges that developed there largely served the king's purposes. Our aim is to reveal how the structure and activity of the court made it a major

² M. Vale. 2001. *The Princely Court. Medieval Courts and Culture in North-West Europe*. Oxford: 179–184; D. Abulafia. 1992. *Frederick II. A Medieval Emperor*. Oxford University Press: 267–271.

³ Tilly 1992.

⁴ *HsH*, Ch. 313.

instrument of control of the kingship over the Norwegian aristocracy. We will show how in defining the gestures, actions and speech of courtiers within the space of the court, the Norwegian kings established the very premises on which all exchanges within the court evolved. Over the course of the century, a set of norms and rules that strictly regulated court life were issued by the kings. However, these norms did not develop in a vacuum. Indeed, they corresponded to an idealized behavior that achieved great popularity in every Western European court: courtliness. This courtly culture was defined and diffused throughout European courts through a literature of the *roman courtois*. Courtly literature constituted an ideal tool for the kings in their strategy for subordinating the aristocracy, teaching them respect and loyalty to their king and consolidating aristocratic cohesion. We will see that the Norwegian kingship was closely involved in the use of the written word at a hitherto unprecedented level. We will also see how the Norwegian kings played a chief role in the diffusion of this literature in Norway and how its introduction favored royal control over the aristocracy.

The Stakes

Before we look more closely at the court and its literature, we will consider what were the stakes involved in the control of the aristocracy.

Norwegian scholarship usually assumes that one of the chief outcomes of the civil war was the emergence of an aristocracy in the king's service in the place of an aristocracy of local leaders who were politically and economically more independent.⁵ This new aristocracy was strongly subordinate to the king and was appointed to official positions in the king's *hirð* and in his local and central administration. The issue of the recruitment of the aristocracy was not limited to the civil war or to Norway. From the end of the 12th century onwards, the Norwegian kings strove to increase their authority over the lands of Norse culture around the North Sea. The islands of the Orkneys, Shetland, the Faroes, Iceland, the Hebrides and the settlements of Greenland were progressively integrated in the kingdom of Norway. The integration of these lands was partly brought about through military expeditions and partly through matrimonial alliances. In any case, the loyalty of these lands to the Norwegian crown was achieved by binding the power elite of the land to the kings of Norway.⁶ For instance, in the case of Iceland, the integration of

5 Bagge 2010a, 53–65 and 1986, 145–197; Helle 1964, 139–144.

6 Randi B. Wærdahl. 2007. "For å oppnå kongens gunst." In Lars Hermanson (ed.) *Vänner, patroner och klienter i Norden 900–1800*. Håskólaútgáfan: 175–193.

the island was not the result of the use of coercion, but of several processes such as persuasion and in particular through integrating the Icelandic aristocracy into the *hirð*.⁷

Throughout the 13th century, control over the aristocracy was a major issue for the Norwegian kings.⁸ It was a challenging one. The aristocracy's divisions of loyalty, its behaviour and lack of discipline were major obstacles to royal control.

Strengthening the Loyalty of the Aristocracy

When Håkon Håkonsson inherited the throne in 1217, he also inherited eighty years of conflict that had deeply divided the realm and its elite. Since the start of the civil war in the 1130s, the Norwegian kingdom had been in a state of almost permanent warfare between candidates to the throne. The magnates and the aristocratic class of warriors had been drawn progressively into the disputes over royal succession and into the factions that supported the pretenders.

The support and the loyalty of the aristocracy was a fundamental issue during King Håkon Håkonsson's reign. From his early years onwards, the king had to face the opposition of rebellious aristocrats quick to reject his rule. In the first decades of the 13th century, despite the reigns of King Sverre and Håkon Sverresson, the Sverrir dynasty was still not firmly anchored in the realm. King Håkon Håkonsson, as heir of King Håkon Sverresson (1202–04), had inherited the right to the throne, but also the long-lasting conflict between the Birkebeiners and the Baglers. While the two parties reconciled in 1217 and hailed the underage Håkon, king of Norway, some Bagler elements, which became known as the Ribbungs rebelled around two pretend-ers: Sigurd Erlingsson, grandson of King Magnus Erlingsson, and Knut Håkonsson, son of Earl Håkon. The death of Sigurd in 1227 and the surrender of Knut a year later could have put an end to the civil war and heralded the advent of unchallenged monarchic rule.⁹ Yet Håkon's legitimacy was also challenged within his ranks. On two occasions in 1218 and 1223, Håkon was compelled to undergo a trial by ordeal at the instigation of Earl Skule, brother of King Inge, also a Birkebeiner candidate to the throne. While Håkon emerged victorious, he still had to share his authority with the Earl as co-ruler.

7 David Brégaunt. 2012b. "Conquering Minds: *Konungs Skuggsía* and the annexation of Iceland." *Scandinavian Studies* 84.4: 439–466; Wærdahl 2011, 89–111; Sigurdsson 2008, 144–146.

8 Bagge 2000, 184–190.

9 Helle 1964, 68–72.

In 1239, this later flared up into open rebellion against King Håkon. It was only with Skule's death in May 1240 that King Håkon became the undisputed ruler of Norway.

King Håkon's election at the *Eyrathing* in 1217 thus did not bring him total control over the realm, as he still had to share the kingdom and its revenue with the earl, as mentioned above. This also concerned the *hirð*, which formally remained under the leadership of the earl and which, according to the saga, swore an oath of fidelity to both of the king and the earl.¹⁰ It did not take long however before the *hirð*'s façade of unity cracked. Soon discontent grew between the two leaders and in the summer of 1218, the *hirð* itself showed serious signs of discord. The enmity between the factions was so intense that King Håkon's men even feared for his life and "let twelve men, armed to the teeth, follow the king every day."¹¹ Although the war against the rebels helped to divert aggression and the marriage between Hakon and Skule's daughter Margrete was meant to restore peace, Skule continued to plot against the king and power-sharing discussions continued to renew tension between the two parties.¹² Slowly the loyalty of the *hirð* thus became divided between the king and the earl.

In the quest for power and influence, the king and the earl engaged in a race to bind rebel magnates and captains to them. At times, they both had the benefit of this rallying. In 1218, the leader of the Slittungs, Asbjørn Jónsson, and his captains dissolved the group and joined the *hirð* of the king and the earl.¹³ But Håkon and Skule also bound men exclusively to their own person. In 1222, Earl Skule came to terms with King Sigurd, leader of the Ribbungs, promising him that "if he puts himself into my power, that he and all his men shall have peace." Sigurd accepted and "gave himself up to earl Skule, and gave up the title of king, and the band came into the earl's power."¹⁴ King Håkon was not to be left out and also actively recruited new liegemen. In 1227 the Ribbung leader, Knut Håkonsson, and his followers swore allegiance to King Håkon and were integrated into his *hirð*.¹⁵ According to the saga, Knut became a loyal vassal of the king and later married the earl's daughter, Ingrid. Knut's loyalty to Håkon even resisted the rebellion of Skule, who in a famous episode attempted to win him

10 *HsH*, Ch. 17.

11 *letu huern dag fylgia konungúnmv xí menn aluapnaða. vm fram þa er fylgð helldv.* (*HsH*, Ch. 40).

12 *HsH*, Chs. 50, 160 and 174.

13 *HsH*, Ch. 48.

14 *ef hann kemur aa mitt vald. ad hann skal grid af mier hafa og aller hans men, and aa valld Skuola jalls j Gridumm, og gaf vp kongs-nafnid, og flockinn j valld Jallsinns* (*HsH*, Ch. 84).

15 *HsH*, Ch. 156.

over to his side.¹⁶ The race for liegemen thus raged throughout the 1220s and 1230s. But King Håkon seemed to attract more men than the earl. In 1235, feeling the tide turning, Skule addressed his men and complained that,

Arnbjörn Jónsson and Gregorius, son to lord Andres [...] became hand-bound to the king, and swore the guardsman's oath to the king alone. And the wording of that oath was very different from that which all men had before sworn to both of us. So did Brynjolf, son of John Stal; and many other men have sworn that oath, and I trust those men worse than those who have taken an oath to both of us.¹⁷

If the *hirð* experienced tensions and divisions during the cohabitation, divided loyalty most certainly remained a sensitive issue for the aristocracy after the death of Duke Skule in 1240. Since 1217, King Håkon and the earl had had their respective retinues. Once Skule was defeated however, the problem of the fate of his men arose. The best source for answering this problem would be the *Hákonar saga*. Unfortunately, its author scarcely addresses the matter. Probably the issue was still too sensitive to be alluded to when the saga was written in the 1260s. We can read however that some of Skule's followers did not come to terms with the king, which suggests that others probably did.¹⁸ Their eventual integration into a unique royal *hirð* was a challenge for the king. Many powerful men had supported the earl and the king surely needed their support as well. This however could potentially create tensions with his own retainers. As the saga shows, in order to justify the integration of the Ribbungs in 1227 and to prevent any reprisals, King Håkon first had to address his men to ask for their agreement.¹⁹

The Hirð's Violence and Lack of Discipline

Obtaining the loyalty and the obedience of the aristocracy, whether they were in the *hirð* or outside it, was not the king's only challenge. As several episodes in the *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga* show, the king constantly had to face and

16 HsH, Ch. 204.

17 Arnbjörn Jonsson, Gregorius ok herra Andres [...] ok giordiz þa handgenginn konginum, ok soru hirð mannzeid einum saman konginum, ok skildi þann eidstað; sem allir hofdu adr suarit badum ockr. Sua giordi ok Bryniolfur, son Jons stals, ok margir menn adrir hafa þann eid suarit, ok trui ek þeim monnum verr en þeim, sem eru begia ockar eidsu-
arar (HsH, Ch. 181).

18 HsH, Ch. 243.

19 HsH, Ch. 156.

resolve the excesses of his liegemen, their lack of discipline and their violent comportment.

The enmity between the men of King Håkon and Earl Skule frequently provoked incidents. It is true that after 1240, the absence of alternative candidates made the division of loyalty less a problem. This does not mean that all problems were resolved. Indeed, although the *Håkonar saga* remains silent about conflict within the *hirð* in particular after 1240, other sources like the *Sturlunga saga* give an account of a serious conflict between an Icelandic liegeman, Þorgils Skarði, and Earl Knut in Nidaros in the winter of 1250–51. The affair was brought to the king, who settled the dispute.²⁰

However, more problematic than the confrontation between differing political convictions was the warriors' violent nature. Repressing aristocratic violence was a fundamental issue for kings who aspired to control warfare abroad and at home.²¹ A traditional measure for dealing with this violence was to divert it to serve a royal cause. During the last twenty years of Håkon's reign, when there was peace at home, the *hirð* and the aristocratic class were not without battles. From 1250 onwards, the king led numerous campaigns against the Danes in which his warriors' impetuosity and violent inclinations could be released freely. In particular, in 1263 he organized a military expedition against Scotland. We do not know which appeal this expedition had among the king's liegemen, but from the saga it becomes clear that King Håkon had no problem in gathering a considerable levy that included both liegemen and stewards and most of the king's vassals in the land.²² In medieval Norway however, aristocratic violence was particularly conspicuous in the noblemen's inclination for drinking.

Traditionally, drinking played an essential role in politics in Northern societies. Political alliances and celebrations as well as religious rituals most often took place in the form of banquets and feasts where good food and drink were to be found in abundance. Indeed, the prodigality of the meals was part of the generosity expected of anybody seeking to play a political role. Drunkenness was considered as an honorable state and the Skaldic poems frequently praised it as a quality of the Gods of the Norse mythology.²³ Drinking sessions were

20 *Þorgils saga skarða*, Ch. 9.

21 R.W. Kaeuper. 2001. *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*. Oxford University Press: 89–120; Strayer 1998.

22 *HsH*, Ch. 316.

23 A.I. Gurevich. 1978. "The Early State in Norway," in H.J.M. Claessen & P. Skalník (ed.) *The Early State*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers: 403–423; Bjørn Qviller. 2004. *Bottles and Battles. The Rise and Fall of the Dionysian Mode of Cultural Production. A study in Political Anthropology and Institutions in Greece and Western Europe*. Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 89–97.

thus a part of the “natural” landscape of the Northern elite in the Middle Ages. The *Sverris saga* and the *Hákonar saga* also cite numerous examples of banquets and drinking sessions organized by the kings. However, in the late 12th and in the 13th century, drinking excesses increasingly became a matter of concern for Norwegian kings and posed a threat to their ambitions.

The earliest episode of this is found in the *Sverris saga*. In the summer of 1186, German merchants had brought significant quantities of wine to the town of Bergen. The beverage was directly responsible of a series of fights and deaths among the townsmen and the king's *hirð*.²⁴ The *Hákonar saga* corroborates drinking problems within the *hirð* and their disastrous consequences for the group's welfare. The condemnation is discreet but remains clear. In one chapter, drunkenness is presented as a threat to the life of the ruler, as in 1221, when nine-year-old King Håkon embarked on board on a ship with his liegemen Asbjørn Jónsson and Gunne Lodinsson: “they had all drunk hard [...] and they sailed into a shore to a harbor, and knew not where they were going.”²⁵ In another episode, heavy drinking led to a man's death. In 1227, the *hirð* of King Håkon and Earl Skule were in Bergen and “there were great drinking-bouts in the town.”²⁶ Alcohol was the cause of a misunderstanding that led one of Håkon's liegeman to commit murder. The murderer found refuge in a church and the king was obliged to exert all his authority over the *hirð* to prevent them from killing the culprit. The episode did not moderate the king's men and still, according to the saga, “There was much other uproar that summer in Bergen for drunkenness sake.”²⁷

3 The Court

The recruitment of the aristocracy and the strengthening of its loyalty and obedience to royal authority through disciplining and pacification was thus a crucial issue for the Norwegian kingship. Spectacular military victories could sway magnates to join the victor's faction. Royal speeches could help to persuade warriors to change their behavior or to consolidate their loyalty, luring them with prospects of social advancement. In the 13th century however, a

24 SvS, Ch. 110.

25 *voru margir men miðok drucknir [...] þa jn til hafna. ok víffu eigi huar þeir foru* (HsH, Ch. 71).

26 *þa voru dryckiur miklar j bænum* (HsH, Ch. 157).

27 *Margt hark annad var vm sumarid j Biorgvin fyrer of-dryckiu saker* (HsH, Ch. 157).

new frame developed that furnished the kings with the most favorable conditions for achieving control over this unruly aristocracy: the royal court.

Decades of scholarship have contributed to a shift away from the consideration of princely courts as superficial excrescences of power limited to hosting and entertaining a frivolous elite.²⁸ The court is now widely seen as a central place of power and an essential element in the process of state formation. As Norbert Elias has pointed out, the royal court was a chief instrument of the government of the realm and a means of extending princely authority.

The court must be studied as a structure of rule that prescribed, like any other, quite specific ways of ruling to the person wishing to control it. To be sure, the court was only a segment of the larger domain of the king. But it represented the central figuration in the whole structure of government, through the mediation of which the king controlled his wider dominion.²⁹

The centrality of the court in the growth of royal power stresses the particular position of the usual residents of courts: the aristocracy. The presence of this group beside the king was by large not incidental, but the result of a deliberate program through which kings aimed to gain control over the aristocracy. In his works on early modern courtly culture, Norbert Elias has demonstrated how princely courts were the locations of a “civilizing process” of aristocratic behavior.³⁰ His conclusions are largely applicable for the medieval period, when the European monarchs were striving to tame their aristocrats.

In the new current of cultural studies, the court is interpreted metaphorically as a stage, a political theatre and a drama in which its members become actors who play a specific role.³¹ This view emphasizes the court’s performative dimension. It becomes the place where both the individual’s and the group’s actions, speech, gestures and appearance structure the way they interacted

28 Joachim Bumke. 2000. *Courtly Culture. Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*. Overlook Duckworth; Aldo Scaglione. 1991. *Knights at Court. Courtliness, Chivalry, & Courtesy. From Ottonian Germany to the Italian Renaissance*. University of California Press; Vale 2001; Steven Gunn. & Janse, A. 2006b. *The Court as a Stage. England and the Low Countries in the Later Middle Ages*. The Boydell Press; Frits Pieter Van Oostrom. 1992. *Court and Culture. Dutch Literature 1350–1450*. University of California Press.

29 Norbert Elias. (1969) 1983. *The Court Society*. Basil Blackwell: 118.

30 Elias 2000; Elias 1983.

31 Gunn & Janse 2006. *The Court as a Stage. England and the Low Countries in the Later Middle Ages*. The Boydell Press.

and presented themselves. Power and authority is reflected in this drama in the metaphorical “script” that every component is performing. The definition and performance of this “script” is the stake of struggles and political and cultural influences. At times it can be imposed by the prince onto his courtiers, or it can also be written by the courtiers themselves.

Sources and Terminology

The famous Welsh court writer Walter Map (1140 – c. 1210) wrote: “In the court I exist and of the court I speak, and what the court is, God knows, I know not.”³² Map would probably have not found much help in analyzing Northern courts. The terminology used to designate the court in 12th and 13th century Norse literature is very unclear. The terms “court” and “courtiers” are usually not distinguished but fall under the word *hirð*, which designates the retinue of the king.³³ In a very few instances, the space that houses the *hirð* is referred to as *konungs garðr* or *hirðgarðr*.³⁴ The lack of a specific terminology for court and courtier is sometimes problematic for the analysis of the specific precinct of the court. The term’s generic character may reflect the strongly itinerant character of the Norwegian kingship, remaining in use even when Norwegian kings increasingly settled in urban residencies. The terms of “courtesie” and the adjective “courtly,” however, made their way into the Norse language – *kurteis* and *høveskir* – illustrating the influence of Western culture on the North in the 13th century.³⁵

We know little about the royal court and court life in 12th and 13th century Norway. For once the saga material is of little help. The *Sverris saga* tells us surprisingly little about the court. A single chapter – found only in one manuscript (AM 327, 4^o) – provides a short glimpse of King Magnus Erlingsson’s court, showing poets, jongleurs and acrobats around the king.³⁶ Unfortunately, the *Hákonar saga* (c. 1260) and the largely incomplete *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* are not more informative about the royal court. Two remarkable documents however provide good information about what the court and court life were like in 13th century Norway: the *Konungs Skuggsía* and the *Hirðskrá*, the law of the retinue. The *Konungs Skuggsía* was written around 1250 and addressed the

32 *In curia sum, et de curia loquor, et nescio, Deus scit, quid sit curia.* (*De Nugis Curialium* 1983: 2–3).

33 «*Hirð*», by Lars Hamre, in KLNLM Vol. VI: 568–577.

34 «*Hof*», by Lars Hamre, KLNLM Vol VI: 629–630.

35 *Hsk*, Ch. 28; *Kgs*, Chs. XXIV, XL.

36 *SvS*, Ch. 85.

elite. It was a *speculum* for merchants, members of the royal retinue and kings, all familiar with the court. The book is supposed to be incomplete and contains three main parts. The second addresses several issues concerning the court, its integration and its life. The *Hirðskrá* is the book of the *hirð*, which was drafted between 1274 and 1277. It is a law which regulates the admission to the *hirð*, the different positions within the *hirð*, and the duties and rights of its members. The law refers to an earlier law, a *fforn hirðskrá*, which may date from the reign of King Sverre and attest that the royal court had already reached a level of complexity that needed regulation.

The Court, a Royal Monopoly?

Before exploring the royal court and its use for achieving control over the aristocracy, it is necessary to say that the royal court was not the sole court in Norway. However, in contrast to most great monarchies of Western Europe, Norway had a limited aristocratic class and very few princes were financially able to sustain a culturally active court of some importance. In theory however, the king had no monopoly over court. The *Hirðskrá* (1274–77) allowed the earl to have a retinue as numerous as that of the king.³⁷ The saga of Håkon does not tell us much about the earl's court. It must be said that the text hardly gives a fair portrait of the king's opponent. However, in principle nothing prevented Skule from developing a court as important and culturally active as Håkon's. Furthermore, judging from the extent of his correspondence with foreign rulers, it is clear that the earl was as open to foreign cultural influences as King Håkon. There also were other princely courts in the direct political sphere of the Norwegian kings. During the 12th and 13th century, the Norwegian rulers gained control over the islands of the North Sea.³⁸ While most were directly administered by the crown, some remained under the authority of a local chief. Thus the Orkneys were ruled by earls who paid homage to the Norwegian kings.

Apart from lay princes, the Norwegian archbishops also had a *hirð*. Indeed, the size of the archbishop's retinue was a repeated motive for conflict under the reign of King Sverre.³⁹ From Sverre's complaints, we know that archbishops were allowed to have a *hirð* of thirty men.⁴⁰ The concordat of 1277 increased its size, which now reached a hundred men. The cultural activity that traditionally

37 *Hsk*, Ch. 17.

38 Wærdahl 2011.

39 Brégaint 2013a, 15 and 28.

40 *SvS*, Ch. 117.

surrounded the prelates of Nidaros made the episcopal court a major center, which probably was by no means inferior to that of the temporal princes. In the 13th century however, as far as we can judge, the court of the Norwegian archbishops was not as splendid as it had been under the times of their 12th-century predecessors. In fact, the sources (again) are scarce and we know virtually nothing about the clerical court of the period. In contrast to the former period, we can hardly track any single literary works directly back to Nidaros.

Alongside these great princely courts, there may have existed small lords' manors and castles, which could also fulfill the function of local courts and centers of courtly culture. In Northern France, Germany, Provence and Limousin, small courts attracted poets and troubadours, and at times even travelling intellectuals.⁴¹ While the Norwegian aristocracy lacked great princes, it was full of precisely these small local lords. However, the contemporary sagas scarcely mention any examples of such courts. The situation in Iceland provides the most significant example of small local courts. Until 1262–64 and the annexation by the Norwegian kings, the island was dominated by a class of chieftains and local lords. This milieu played a fundamental role in the making of the Icelandic sagas. In the 13th century, Icelandic magnates increasingly sought the court of the Norwegian kings in order to gain prestige and to consolidate their political power on the island. With the integration of Iceland into the realm of Norway, however, the local principalities were abolished and a cultural and literary decline followed the chieftains' political loss of power.⁴² The situation in the Orkneys was very similar. We know very little about the court of the earls, although they probably had a small one. However, as these lands lost their political sovereignty to the Norwegian kings, they also lost their power of attraction, and skalds and intellectuals increasingly abandoned these peripheral courts to attend the more prestigious and rewarding ones.⁴³

The increasing decline of comital and ducal courts as well as the "disappearance" of the archiepiscopal court throughout the 13th century propelled the royal court into the position of the major locus for the aristocratic elite in the realm, providing the Norwegian kingship with a unique communication space.

41 Bumke 2000, 485–487; Bezzola 2011, Vol III, 313–348.

42 Axel Kristinsson. 2003. "Lords and Literature: The Icelandic Sagas as Political and Social Instruments." *Scandinavian Journal of History* Vol. 28, 1: 14–17.

43 Sigurdsson 2008, 180; William P.L. Thomson. (1987) 2008. *The New History of Orkney*. Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd: 101–137.

4 Monarchic Program and Aristocratic Demand

Scholarship usually gives King Håkon Håkonsson full credit for the introduction and diffusion of the ideals of courtliness in Norway.⁴⁴ The king is easily portrayed as fascinated by his Western counterparts, aiming to emulate them and their courts. He and his successors were mainly responsible for the translation of foreign literature and poems and the supervision of courtly codes and laws. However, the nature of the kings' role and involvement remains difficult to assess. In practice, courtliness was only marginally a royal phenomenon. The truth is that courtly culture involved every part of the social elite at different levels. As such, the aristocracy and the Church also played a decisive role in the introduction of courtly ideals to the court of Norwegian kings.

In the scholarship, the examination of royal commitment has largely focused on the translations commissioned by King Håkon. The debate has moved radically from the naïve approach defended by Leach, who admired the king's "passion for the thing of the spirit," to a conception ascribing clear political motives.⁴⁵ This view considers the introduction of courtly norms through translated literature as part of a deliberate strategy to control the aristocracy of the kingdom within the more general framework of the consolidation of royal power.

The pioneering work of Kalinke on the *Matter of Britain* in Norse leaves no doubt that Håkon's activity was part of a program.⁴⁶ According to Liliane Irlenbusch-Reynard, the commissioning of translations of Old French romances into Old Norse was part of "a well-planned and highly selective programme" that aimed at building a monarchy on the model of Western European kingdoms.⁴⁷ Ferrer and Fidjestøl also subscribe to this theory and readily associate the translations with the consolidation of royal power; the latter even terms King Håkon's patronage "a state publishing venture."⁴⁸ In a very similar manner, in her study about royal propaganda and popular culture, Eriksen defends

44 Marianne Kalinke. 1981. *King Arthur North-by-Northwest. The matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*. Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel A/S; Marlen Ferrer. 2012. "State-Formation and Courtly Culture in the Scandinavian Kingdoms." *Scandinavian Journal of History* Vol. 37, No. 1: 1–22; Leach 1921, 50 ff.; Glauser 2005, 375; Halvorsen 1973, 19 ff.; Liliane Irlenbusch-Reynard. 2011. "Translations at the Court of Håkon Håkonarson: A well planned and highly selective programme." *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol. 36: 4: 387–405.

45 Leach 1921, 150.

46 Kalinke 1981, 20.

47 Irlenbusch-Reynard 2011, 387–405.

48 Ferrer 2012, 1–22; Bjarne Fidjestøl. 1997. "Romantic reading at the court of Håkon Håkonarson." in Odd E. Haugen & Else Mundal (ed.) *Selected Papers*. Odense University Press: 354.

“the hypothesis that King Håkon undertook this cultural enterprise in order to Europeanize his own court and image and, in this way, to legitimate a transformation of his kingship, from a local Norse type to a more European type.”⁴⁹ In Barnes’s words, it was “a project [...] associated with Håkon’s desire to expand and upgrade the cultural horizons of his court, to strengthen and raise the status of the Norwegian kingship, to gain the recognition and respect of his European peers, and to propel Norway into the mainstream of international affairs.”⁵⁰ Finally, according to Sverre Bagge, “the development from classical sagas to 13th century courtly culture became a decisive part of the process of state-formation” and “a link in a general process of internationalization initiated by the kingship.”⁵¹

Queen Euphemia’s acts of literary patronage at the court of Oslo at the turn of the 13th century have also been viewed as an example of a strategy to achieve political goals through the implementing of courtly values. Queen Euphemia apparently exercised great control over the selection of the works to be translated and scholars have tended to ascribe political motives to her literary patronage. Scholars like P.A. Munch and Valter Jansson argued in their own time that each of the three translations she commissioned was produced to further progress the engagement of her daughter, Ingeborg, to the Swedish king, Erik Magnusson.⁵² Recently, Layher has viewed the three translations as part of her strategy to secure Ingeborg an advantageous match with Erik by building up the Norwegian court as an up-to-date cultural milieu that enhanced “Ingeborg’s status as a noblewoman.”⁵³

Courtliness, the Church and the Aristocracy

The rich patronage activity of the Norwegian kings in the 13th century truly made them key actors in the introduction of courtly culture in Norway. Furthermore, the absence of explicit evidence in the source material clearly makes it difficult to assess the degree of the aristocracy’s involvement. However, in view of several basic elements we can contend the participation of other actors in the project.

49 Stefka Georgieva Eriksen. 2007. “Popular Culture and Royal Propaganda in Norway and Iceland in the 13th Century.” *Collegium Medievale*. 20: 99.

50 Geraldine Barnes. 2009. «Scandinavian Versions of Arthurian Romance.» In Helen Fulton (ed.) *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*. Blackwell, West Sussex: 191.

51 Bagge 2000, 189, 210.

52 Munch 1858, 4.2: 522; Valter Jansson. 1945. *Eufemiavisorna, en filologisk undersökning*. Lundequist.

53 William Layher. 2010. *Queenship and Voice in Medieval Northern Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan: 101.

First, many elements linked the Church to aristocratic conduct. Together with the crown, the Church was a major party in the channeling and domestication of aristocratic violence. In continental Europe, the domestication of the aristocracy was in keeping with the general context of pacification of society. One of the leading elements of this policy of peace was the movement of *Pax Dei*, which was initiated by the Church in the late 10th century in France and flourished during the following century. The ideology of peace embodied in the Peace of God movement reached Norway and Iceland shortly after the foundation of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1153.⁵⁴ Several extant letters from the late 12th and early 13th century witness the efforts of the popes and the Norwegian bishops to condemn violence against clerics.⁵⁵ The introduction of the ideal of *rex iustus* – the righteous king protector of the Church – with the crowning of King Magnus Erlingsson was decisive, as it included peace-keeping among the fundamental tasks for future kings. Furthermore, as Jaeger has demonstrated, courtliness was inherently clerical, as it was originally developed by clerics in the imperial courts of the 10th and 11th centuries. The original prototype of the courtly prince was the courtier-cleric, which was embodied in the person of the bishop.⁵⁶ Later, when royal courts developed in the 12th and 13th century and the ideals of courtliness spread among lay courtiers, clerics still constituted essential intermediaries as the authors of translations of courtly romances.⁵⁷

The adoption of courtly culture at the Norwegian court was also supported by the courtiers' genuine interest and demand. According to Knut Helle, the court of the Norwegian kings "demanded its own literature. The older Norwegian literature, consisting of sermons and saints' lives together with a few historical works, was no longer adequate for the educated courtiers and their families."⁵⁸

54 J.V. Sigurdsson. 2003. "Island og Nidaros." in Imsen 2003: 121–139; Sverrir Jakobsson. 2008. "The Peace of God in Iceland in the 12th and 13th centuries." in *Sacri canones servandi sunt. Ius canonicum et status ecclesiae saeculis XIII–XV. Opera Instituti historici Pragae. Series C – Miscellanea*, 19 ritsj. Pavel Krafl, Prag: 205–213.

55 Jakobsson 2008, 208.

56 C.S. Jaeger. 1985. *The Origins of Courtliness – Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals – 939–1210*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 19–48.

57 C. Girbea. 2010. *Communiquer pour convertir dans les romans du Graal (XIIe–XIIIe siècles)*. Éditions Classiques Garnier: 179–200.

58 Knut Helle. 1968. "Anglo-Norwegian Relations in the Reign of Håkon Håkonsson (1217–63)." *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 1: 108.

The fascination of Norwegian magnates with their European fellows and in particular with their manners and culture is rather difficult to assess from the available documentation. In the sources, royal involvement almost completely overshadows any interest that came from courtiers. Independently of the action of the king, however, it is hardly conceivable that the Norwegian aristocracy was exempt from a process that saw the European aristocracies increasingly become a homogenous group that adhered to the same cultural standards.

Like for their English and continental counterparts, courtliness was a source of prestige for the Norwegian aristocracy and played a fundamental role in the making of aristocratic identity. Courtly manners were the mark of a specific social status and they intensified the distinction between those who belonged to the elite and those who did not. In addition to wealth and military power, culture and manners reinforced social hierarchy.⁵⁹ Courtly culture also was central within the aristocracy. For its members, it was a means of socializing. Sharing the same norms for behavior and the same cultural horizon favored membership and consolidated the cohesion of the group. However, the different levels of accomplishment in manners, eloquence, luxury and culture also contributed to establishing a stronger hierarchy between nobles.⁶⁰ In the 12th and 13th centuries, courtliness and courtly culture were also inherently aristocratic and chiefly addressed the lay aristocracy present at princely courts. The subject of whether courtly modes of behavior were imposed by a central authority or constituted a model of conduct which the aristocracy deliberately imposed on itself as a means of social distinction is a central debate. The first view has been clearly defined by the works of Johan Huizinga and Norbert Elias, who perceived courtliness as a process of domestication and control of the aristocracy by the crown.⁶¹ According to Richard Kaeuper however, "the formally polite modes of behavior seem less an intrusive check on knighthood than an expression of the knights' own high sense of worth, of rightful dominance in society; good manners were less a restraint on knightly behavior than they were its characteristic social expression."⁶²

59 Marlen Ferrer. 2008. *Emotions in Motion: Emotional diversity in 13th century Spanish and Norse society*. Oslo: Faculty of Humanities: 206–208.

60 Ferrer 2008.

61 Johan Huizinga. (1924) 1948. *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. London: Edward Arnold & Co; Elias 2000, 365–379.

62 Kaeuper 2001, 206.

It is true that, unlike for Western European courtiers, courtly culture represented a true challenge in Norway. The ideals of knighthood and courtly love often stood in direct opposition to local values and norms. Indeed, in the world of princely courts, Norwegian courtiers seem to have suffered a very bad reputation. Our documentary sources largely echo the general crudeness and backwardness of the Norwegian elite. As the work of Theodoricus Monachus suggests, this reputation stemmed directly from the Vikings and their notorious cruelty. In his *Historia De Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*, Theodoricus emphasizes that contemporary Norwegian kings are far more civilized than their Viking forebears, worthy of having their history written.⁶³ It seems that despite Theodoricus's efforts, the Norwegians continued to suffer a bad reputation late in the 13th century. Thus in a letter from July 1241, Pope Gregory IX exempted King Håkon and his subjects from participating to the crusade to the Holy Land because of "the poverty of its inhabitants, as well as their ignorance of the intervening languages."⁶⁴ This was an opinion shared by the Norwegian king himself who judged "impetuous and imprudent, impatient of any sort of injury or restraint," in contrast to the pride of the French.⁶⁵

Royal Mediation and Connection to Foreign Courts

The involvement of the aristocracy in cultural transfer should also be considered in view of their exposure to courtly culture through their connections with foreign courts. In the first years of his rule as sole monarch of Norway, King Håkon increased diplomatic contacts with most Western European monarchies – the English King Henry III, the French King Louis IX, the Emperor Frederick II, and the Castilian nobility, and even with non-European principalities, like the Sultan of Tunis and the Prince of Novgorod.⁶⁶ The *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* is much too incomplete to provide evidence of similar contacts during the reign of Magnus the Lawmender. Several diplomas exist however, and witness to frequent contact with foreign courts up to the end of the century: those of the French king Philip IV, the English kings Henri III and Edward I, the German king Adolf of Nassau, and Alfonso X, King of Castile.⁶⁷

63 *Historia*, prologue.

64 *paupertatem hominum regni tui ac ignorantiam linguarum interiacentium* (DN I, nr. 24).

65 *Gens mea impetuosa est et indiscrete, impatiensque omnium injuriarum, sed et modestiae*, (CM Vol. IV).

66 Helle 1968, III.

67 RN, Vol. II, 1264–1300.

However, if contacts with the great European monarchies were initiated by the monarch, they also significantly involved the members of his court, who received foreign delegations and also were used as messengers for the king abroad. Indeed, we have no record of Norwegian kings who personally met their German, English, French or Castilian counterparts. In 1247, the French king and King Håkon Håkonsson both planned to take the cross, but only the French king and English barons left for the East. An opportunity to meet a foreign monarch was gone. Diplomatic and political exchanges between kings most often was made through royal envoys recruited from faithful servants of the king among the nobility.⁶⁸ The *Konungs Skuggsía* makes explicit the duty of the men of the *hirð* to serve as envoys “abroad in embassies to foreign rulers and other princes.”⁶⁹ Later, the author enjoined these envoys to carefully observe the manners at the courts to which they were sent.⁷⁰

In 1257, Princess Christine was sent to Spain with a great and impressive escort composed of several nobles, “a hundred men and many noble ladies.”⁷¹ The journey down to Spain was to cross Europe and visit the leading courts in the fashion of courtliness and courtly culture in the 13th century. Indeed, the cortege sailed first to England and then to France, where they visited King Louis IX to bring messages from the King of Norway. After that they went on to Aragon and finally to Castile, where the marriage took place, and everywhere the cortege was well received by the local nobility.⁷² When this little army of Norwegian nobles escorted Princess Christine to Spain, the prospect of seeing prestigious foreign courts must have created great interest among Norwegian courtiers and must partly explain why so many nobles were willing to participate in this expedition.⁷³ Sturla’s account of the voyage of the princess is very detailed and does not spare eulogistic remarks on the manner the escort was welcomed at the different courts. The narrative certainly aimed to exalt the royal family, but it also was meant to cater to the curiosity of courtiers and their appetite for recognition by their illustrious counterparts.

Similarly, Håkon’s contact with the German emperor was largely sustained through frequent exchanges of envoys – often high-ranking officers – and

68 Leach 1921, 36–72.

69 *farar lannda amillum til utlænzcrá kononga eða annarra hofðingia* (*Kgs*, Ch. XXVII).

70 *Kgs*, Ch. XXIX.

71 *HsH*, Ch. 290.

72 *HsH*, Ch. 294.

73 *HsH*, Chs. 290 and 294.

gifts.⁷⁴ We know of four emissaries from Norway: in 1237, Gudleif of Ask met the emperor at his court in Sicily. Shortly after, a certain Nicholas Paulsson went to Germany and was long at the emperor's court.⁷⁵ That same year, Roi and Bard followed him to the court. Finally, a man called Henry the messenger went on many errands to Germany.⁷⁶ A final example of contacts with foreign courts through royal envoys is the stay of Audun Hugleiksson at the court of the French King Philip the Fair. In summer of 1295, Audun, King Eirik Magnusson's powerful advisor, spent nearly four months in Paris negotiating a military treaty between the two kingdoms.⁷⁷ Audun was a learned man, and his interest focused probably less on purely literary matters than on law. What cultural gains Audun drew from his stay remain largely conjectural. What benefits the Norwegian court could draw from Audun at his return is even more speculative.

The position of courtiers in the process of communication at court is complex. They certainly were the main audience and in this respect they constituted the chief target for royal policies. But courtiers also acted as independent agents embedded with a true interest in and demand for this foreign culture. As such, they actively contributed to its diffusion at court. The introduction of courtly values at the Norwegian court cannot be viewed simply as a story of oppression and manipulation of the aristocratic class. If Norwegians courtiers were victims, they were partly consenting and participating victims.

Cultural Monopoly and Economic Power

The analysis above stresses the limits of the model of the aristocracy's instrumentalization by the kingship. Norwegian aristocrats probably aspired to adapt to courtly culture and consciously favored its adoption at court. Although the Norwegian kings played a decisive role in the translation of courtly ideals, their achievements responded to courtiers' demands. Courts' interconnections favored the kings as much as their courtiers. However, the economic and political power of the Norwegian kings allowed them to conduct a coherent and consequent programme of patronage which resulted in the translation of

74 For an overview, see Ian Grohse. 2009. *Auswärtige Beziehungen Norwegens unter Håkon IV. Håkonsson: Personale Bindungen, Personalstrukturen und diplomatische Verhandlungen zwischen 1240 und 1263*. MA-thesis. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin: 33–35.

75 *HsH*, Ch. 191.

76 *Ibid.*

77 C.O. Munthe. 1932–33. *Hr. Audun Hugleiksson Hestakorn til Hegrans og hans herre Kong Eirik Magnusson*. Bergens Historiske Forenings Skrifter nr. 38–39: 135 ff.

Western Europe's most central works of courtly literature into Norse. This power enabled kings to hold a dominant position in this cultural process, in which kings were positioned as the necessary intermediaries.

In her study about courtly culture and state formation in medieval Scandinavia, Marlen Ferrer points out the decisive role of kings and their courts. She views the greater economic and political independence of the Danish and Swedish aristocracy and the comparatively weaker power of their rulers as a decisive element in the underdevelopment of courtly literature in these kingdoms. This did not completely prevent Danish and Swedish aristocrats, she states, from being acquainted with courtesy and courtly manners. However, these ideals seemed rather to have pervaded these aristocratic milieus orally or through foreign literature in German or Norse, not through native translations.⁷⁸ More than anything, her reflections stress both the necessity of resources for the development of courtly culture and its limits. For if the relative "poverty" of Danish and Swedish kings prevented them from initiating a policy of literary patronage, the relative "wealth" of their aristocracy was not more profitable either. Apart from the "determination" of kings to become active commissioners of chivalric literature, in my opinion Ferrer rightly stresses a decisive premise for the flourishing of courtly culture: the existence of a court. The court that is spoken of here cannot be matched by most aristocratic courts. Despite the wealth of aristocrats, few were sufficiently rich to finance projects of translation or copying of foreign romances. Scholars, writers and jongleurs needed salaries or remuneration.

The material aspects of the production (rooms, parchments, etc.) also monopolized important resources over long periods of time.⁷⁹ Despite their political networks of allies and vassals, most aristocrats also probably failed to attract enough courtiers to constitute a milieu propitious for court culture. Cultural patronage required a broad variety of resources in sufficient quantity, which small aristocratic courts and poor royal courts could not fully provide. Again size to me appears crucial. Overall, cultural patronage required sufficient economic resources, the existence of an audience large enough to constitute a "milieu," and the aptitude to attract competent writers, poets and troubadours. Finally we should not forget the importance of prestige in attracting famous scholars, poets and artists. Kings had a considerable advantage with respect to other courts. The royal court often was the most prestigious and

⁷⁸ Ferrer 2012, 1–22.

⁷⁹ Martin Warnke. 1993. *The Court Artist. On the ancestry of the modern artist*. Cambridge University Press: 111–174.

famous artists most probably preferred to perform at the court of an illustrious prince whose interest in the arts was limited than at the court of a local lord, even if this lord was passionate about poetry. In his study of culture at court, Van Oostrom concludes: “Only through the establishment of large royal and ducal households could a stable court culture flourish, with a sophisticated audience permanently present and a much larger public at hand for regular celebrations and performances.”⁸⁰ Often only the royal court fulfilled the material, social and cultural conditions to become a significant center of culture.⁸¹

5 Domesticating the Body

Courtliness was the art of appearance. The courteous values of moderation and self-restraint, which were meant to restrain aristocratic violence, were realized in the control of the body.⁸² A nobleman walked and stood in specific fashion. He spoke a particular language according to precise codes of precedence. The courteous man ate and dressed in a refined manner. Courtly attitudes, movements and postures, dress and conversation helped to “visually” distinguish the nobleman from the commoner. As exemplified by the Norwegian *Konungs Skuggsía* and the *Hirðskrá*, the internalization of moral values and the embodiment of principles of subordination to the kingship were achieved through physical techniques and rules of etiquette.

As C.S. Jaeger rightly stressed, the instruction of courtiers was largely based on the imitation of exemplary figures.⁸³ It was in drawing inspiration from the king and imitating his postures and attitudes that courtiers would learn the proper virtues and values. This pedagogic principle, or “charismatic pedagogy” to quote Jaeger, is reproduced in the dialogue between the father and the son in the *Konungs Skuggsía*. The son’s learning is based on his father’s life and experience. The concept of *speculum*, itself, is based on the principle of an ideal point of reference as a model for the reader.

80 Van Oostrom 1992, 8.

81 See in C.H. Haskins. 1926. “The spread of ideas in the Middle Ages.” *Speculum*, Vol. 1, No. 1: 23–24.

82 Elias 1983 and 2000. See also the remarks of Martin Aurell. 2002. *La noblesse en Occident (Ve-XVe)*. Armand Colin: 104–107.

83 C.S. Jaeger, 1994. *The Envy of Angels. Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200*. University of Pennsylvania Press: 76–83.

Etiquette at court was not limited to determining the proper conduct for every specific situation. It also defined a hierarchy between courtiers. Thus, at court every set of rules was systematically related to the king in such a fashion that it ascribed him dominance above courtiers. Particular rules of conduct, dress and conversation applied in the presence of the king. Finally, managing the body necessitated a long-lasting apprenticeship. Repetition of gestures and rules of speech were a day-to-day exercise. The person of the king was also at the center of every pattern of courteous behavior. The principles of submission to royal authority largely were based on daily experience. It was in living together with the king that the retainer would learn to submit to his master and to love him. The life of courtiers at court was scheduled on the king's doings and movements.

Securing Presence at Court

Bringing the nobility to court, where they would learn to show themselves loyal towards the king and attain self-control, was the first stage in the royal program. If anything, the Norwegian king exerted a strong control over the movements of his retainers throughout the kingdom. In becoming the king's liegemen, a man lost his liberty to travel at will. The *Hirðskrá* states that "no one of the king's liegemen shall fare without his permission."⁸⁴ This concerned all liegemen from the lowest grade to its most prominent members, even the earl: "Nor shall the earl leave the country unless he has the king's permission."⁸⁵ In the summer of 1227, Earl Skule wanted to go to Nidaros and then to Denmark to meet King Valdemar the Young. Although the earl most probably was more powerful than King Håkon Håkonsson, he had to "beg the king that he would [give] him leave to fare," which the king granted.⁸⁶ By law the king's men were required to ask for the king's permission before leaving the country. If the liegemen broke the rule, the king could exclude them from his service. In practice, the punishment could be as severe as death. The most famous example is that of the Iclander Snorri Sturluson, *lendmann* of the king, who in 1239 defied his interdiction and left for Iceland to avenge kinsmen. King Håkon proclaimed him a traitor and sent men to bring him back or to kill him if he refused, which was done in 1241.⁸⁷ This control was particularly strong over courtiers from the

84 *Engi konongs æiðsuare skal fara fra kononge vttan hans løyuis* (Hsk, Ch. 29).

85 *Eigi skal oc hærtoge or lande fara nema konongs se læyui til* (Hsk, Ch. 17).

86 *Skuli Jarl bad Hakon kong gefa sier ordlof: ad fara nordur til ÞRandheims og síjdann sudur til Danmerkur a fund Valldimars Dana-kongs.* (HsH, Ch. 158).

87 HsH, Chs. 195, 243.

overseas territories. The *Hákonar saga* abounds in examples where Norwegian kings forbade liegemen from Iceland or the Orkneys to go back to their land, and obliged them to wait several years before they were authorized to do so. In 1230, Jón Murt, son of Snorri Sturluson wished to go home in the summer, but the king refused him permission.⁸⁸ In the winter of 1250, many liegemen from Iceland wished to sail back home, but the king allowed only one of them, Gizurr Þorvaldsson.⁸⁹

Yet controlling movements in and out of Norway was one thing, and securing the presence of liegemen at court was another. This presence was not obligatory and the crown had to rely on persuasion to make the king's men stay at the court. This is where a book like the *Konungs Skuggsía* came into play. An essential aim of the book was to enlist noble men in the service of the king. Over eighteen chapters, the author of *Konungs Skuggsía* teaches readers about the royal retinue and about the rules of court life. The main motivation behind the thorough and systematic exploration of court life is curiosity. In the dialogue established between the father and his son, which structures the whole text, the son asks his father to teach him about the manners at court.⁹⁰ The son's interest in court life however is not central for him as he wishes to first become a merchant.⁹¹ His choice seems based on his assumption that court life will not live up to his expectations, and the father is invited to find arguments to persuade him to enter royal service.

The strategy used was thus that of seduction and persuasion. In order to convince the aristocracy to join the royal court, the author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* lured them with bright prospects. The chapter entitled "The advantages derived from service in the king's household" argues that royal service provides practical benefits to liegemen, such as protection, honors and noble positions.⁹² These advantages, however, are conditional on presence at court. In his demonstration, the author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* systematically contrasts the royal court to local milieus. Thus, while he exalts the privileged situation of the royal court, he also admits that wealth and powerful men do not need royal protection. The best protection however is provided at court.⁹³ Indeed, royal service still offered protection outside court as the king could demand fines that were large enough to

88 *Ísl*, Ch.79.

89 *HsH*, Ch. 270.

90 *Kgs*, Ch. xxiv.

91 *Kgs*, Ch. iii.

92 *Kgs*, Ch. xxvi.

93 *Ibid*.

dissuade attacks against his liegemen.⁹⁴ Honors were the second benefit which a liegeman could gain by entering the king's service. The author concedes that some may reach honorable positions outside the court. However, the royal court provided a unique opportunity for social advancement as "it often happens that the king gives high honors to such men in return for their service, if they perform it well, though they are but slightly honored in their own homes."⁹⁵ Presence at court and proximity to the king was essential for acquiring these honors.

The *Hirðskrá* similarly stresses that proximity to the king was the best way to obtain advancement, "for it is most frequently those persons who acquire positions of honor, and they are the first to occupy those which become vacant."⁹⁶ The second gain for the candidate, and probably the most important for the king, is soon revealed: "There can anyone learn something good, for there comes many who can and knows what is good. And there is much good in learning common sense and courteous manners and becoming acquainted with many good men."⁹⁷

Ritualizing Court Life

The courtier was born in the ceremony of vassalage. Entering the *hirð* was a meticulously orchestrated operation. The ritual is described in the *Konungs Skuggsía* and the *Hirðskrá*. The *Konungs Skuggsía* explains in detail the procedure a candidate was to follow to apply for admission to court. The specific ritual of vassalage is only mentioned *en passant*. By contrast, the *Hirðskrá* gives a precise description of the gestures, staging and oath that sanctioned the dubbing of the vassal. According to the *Konungs Skuggsía*, the candidate must carefully choose a patron who will support his application and the right moment to present it. These parameters are directly dependent on the king: A good patron will be one who is appreciated by the king, and the good timing is when the king is in good mood. Once the meeting is imminent, the candidate must carefully dress himself in order to give a good impression; the fabric of the clothes and the choice of colors are described in great detail, as is the right haircut. Great attention is given to the posture and gestures of the candidate; the body must be erect when walking, and when standing before the king

94 *Ibid.*

95 *þeir fa mikil mætorð af konongi sacar þionosto sinnar æf þeir kunnu til at geta. er heima varo litils virder iðæraðe (Ibid.).*

96 *taka þeir sœmðir oc first. þær sem tœmazt (Hsk, Ch. 29).*

97 *þar nemr oc æ huar nokot goðz er þar til vil hava sik þui at þeir koma þar flestir er nokot goðz kunnu. oc er þo æi æicki goðz .i. aflat at þu nemir vit oc kurtæisi oc kannezt við margan goðan mann. (Ibid.).*

the candidate's "thumb and forefinger of the right will grasp the left wrist; and then let your hands drop slowly before you."⁹⁸ All these considerations are not mentioned in the *Hirðskrá* and we must assume that the ritual of vassalage itself placed the king in a sitting position with a sword on his knees. The king's hands are also placed on the sword according to definite rules:

The king shall have his sword resting on his knee, his coronation sword if he has been crowned, and he shall place it under his arm with the chape pointing backwards and lay the hilt over his right knee; he shall then wrap the strap buckle up over the hilt and grasp it all from the upper side with his right hand.⁹⁹

The candidate shall then bow down before the king, grip the king's hand with his right hand and kiss it. He shall then stand again in order to swear an oath of allegiance on the Bible. Finally the candidate shall again go down on his knees, place his hands in those of the king and kiss the king. With this, the candidate became liegeman of the king. The *Hirðskrá* specifies that after the ceremony of vassalage, the new liegeman is taken away from the king and is presented to the *hirð*.

The ceremony was a powerful display of royal domination over the liegeman. The gravity of the gestures executed and the words said created powerful bonds that were certainly strong enough to secure the liegeman's loyalty. The vassal was also well aware of the consequences if he broke his oath of allegiance to the king, which also was a strong motivation preventing felony. However, regardless of how symbolically strong the ceremony was, this act occurred just once. Full obedience and loyalty also needed to be consolidated through the observance of daily practices. For the king, this operation was to occur at the court. The *Konungs Skuggsía* describes a set of practices which the courtier had to perform every day and which were intimately connected on the person of the king.

The author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* presents a life at court which is systematically organized along the activities and doings of the king. He designs a whole set of practices and activities which will allow the courtier to be by the

98 *hægrei greipi spennni vm hinn vinstra vlf lid og lat sijdan hendur þinar rekiast nidur firi þig* (*Kgs*, Ch. xxx).

99 *Konongr skal hava suærð sitt a kne ser vigslusuerð ef hann er koronaðr oc venna aftr ðogs-konum unðlir honð ser. oc læggia meðalkaflann fram ivir höggra kne ser. Siðan skal hann sveipa fetils sylgiunni upp ivir meðalkaflan oc gripi sua högri hendi ovan ivir allt saman* (*Hsk*, Ch. 31).

king's side as much as possible. The proximity to the king is the first thing a courtier should seek during the day. He thus strongly advises retainers early in the morning to escort the king on his way to the church, to attend mass with him and in particular to leave the church with him and to keep sufficiently near him to be in sight.¹⁰⁰ He also instructs retainers to present themselves at the king's chamber early in the morning and to wait for his orders. It is fitting too to follow the king on his movements, for example at church, but also outside the court in the countryside.¹⁰¹

The *Hirðskrá* also gives indications concerning the duty of courtiers to follow the king. But here, unlike the *Konungs Skuggsía*, the law suggests that courtiers were appointed to meet and did not come on their own authority. The time for meeting is also carefully planned: "they shall not come in service later than the chapels ring the first Mass."¹⁰² The train thus constituted will wait by the church where the king is attending mass, and thereafter follow him wherever he goes. The group will follow him all the day, "both before meals, at dinner, and the rest of the day."¹⁰³ The law stipulates that any infringements of the rule will be punished. We see here that the *Hirðskrá* adopts a rather more coercive tone considering the duties of the courtiers than the *Konungs Skuggsía*. The latter however is a book of advice and although we saw that it points out the dangers of failing the king, it merely seeks to incite the courtier to do the right thing from himself. The author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* promotes this self-discipline in ritualizing the practice of being close to the king at any time. He insists on the necessity of repeating the actions daily to make them a habit: "you must make a habit of going to the royal apartments early in the morning."¹⁰⁴ For the author, being a proper courtier is a task which takes years and requires "a daily presence at court among the men of the *hirð* in the king's own presence."¹⁰⁵ Similarly, the author erects as models of perfect conduct those who are *ner konongi íallum*, "constantly near the king."¹⁰⁶ Later again, he refers to "those who bear the *hirdman's* name and should be very

100 *Snemma um morna skallt þu honum til kirkiu, fylgia æf hann fylger [...] a fylgh þu honum oc vær sua noccor nærr honum staddr at þu ser thans augliti, (Kgs, Ch. XXXVII).*

101 *Ibid.*

102 *þeir skulu eigi koma sæinna til fylgðarhalðz. en ringt er at smalkirkivm til otto songs (Hsk, Ch. 27).*

103 *bæðe firir mat oc sua at borðe oc allan dag síðan (Ibid.).*

104 *þvi skalltþu oc vænia þec at þu vitia arla morna konongs hærbærgis (Kgs, Ch. XXXVII).*

105 *væri hann hværn dag innan hirðar med konongi (Ibid.).*

106 *Kgs, Ch. XXXIV.*

close to the king.”¹⁰⁷ Finally, as a king’s man you “should frequently be seen in your lord’s presence.”¹⁰⁸ The *Hirðskrá* also strongly incited the members of the retinue to be in proximity to the king as much as possible: “If you stay at the same place as the king, be close to him as often as possible [...] and if you do not have any important business to do, stay then as long as possible by him.”¹⁰⁹

The courtiers’ presence at court and in his direct vicinity allowed the king to exert a continuous control on the sayings and doings of his courtiers. It also enabled the king to show himself in a favorable way. Being the center of everybody’s attention, constantly surrounded by men ready to obey and serve him, the king incontestably impressed each independent courtier, and by a self-reinforcing movement personally reproduced the system.

Dress Code

Courtesy was also reflected in clothing and physical appearance. These elements played a significant role in the distinction between the elite and the rest of society.¹¹⁰ In the Middle Ages, dresses and clothes marked social rank. In the 12th and 13th century, laws prohibited peasants from wearing colorful clothes and precious fabrics. Haircuts were also strictly regulated. Colorfulness, costly fabrics, jewelry and decorations were the privilege of the nobility.¹¹¹ From the mid-12th century, courtly culture made the tailoring and color of clothes a central aspect of courtesy. A new element was courtiers’ increasing interest in what was the fashion for clothes and haircuts at the most prestigious courts. Their appetite for the perfect length of sleeves or the right color for shows was often satisfied by poets who, thanks to the itinerant nature of their work, were well acquainted with the “new fashions” and spread them in lengthy and thoroughly detailed verses.¹¹² Courtly literature also was an ideal vehicle for spreading the proper dressing manners. The works about the *Matter of Britain* in

107 *þat er hiðmanna nofn bæra. oc nær gonglir skolo væra konongi* (*Ibid.*).

108 *þu skalt opt væra kenndr ínand hofðingia þinum* (*Kgs*, Ch. xxxvii).

109 *Ef þu ert þar staðr sem konongr er þ aver æ sem oftast nest honom [...] oc ef æigi banna þær stor nauðsyniar vm þiun skylðar ærenðe, þ aver æ sem længst matt þu hia þinum kononge* (*Hsk*, Ch. 29).

110 See the study of Lachaud about dress and display in medieval England, Frédérique Lachaud. 2002. “Dress and social status in England.” In Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (ed.) *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*. The Boydell Press: 105–123.

111 Bumke 2000, 128–136; Michel Pastoureau. 2004. *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental*. Seuil: 113 ff; Martin Aurell. (ed.) 2008. *Signes et couleurs des identités politiques du Moyen Âge à nos jours*. Presses Universitaires Rennes 11.

112 Bumke 2000, 130–132.

particular contained long descriptions of the fabrics, color and cuts of the clothes worn by the protagonists at King Arthur's court.

Clothing at court was regulated by specific dress codes. The first extant code was written at the court of King Alfonso X of Castile and is preserved in *Las Siete Partidas*.¹¹³ The Norwegian *Konungs Skuggsía* also contains several references to what was suitable to wear at court and in presence of the king in particular. The *Hirðskrá* also contains a few thoughts on dress codes. Again, moderation is the rule. The men of the *hirð* shall take care to be well clothed, but, "not the way other men can find it too ostentatious."¹¹⁴ In a general manner, the author counts as being courteous "to know how to select one's clothes both as to color and other considerations."¹¹⁵ Later he also advises the prospective *hirð* man to ensure that they have clean clothes.¹¹⁶ The dress code is however much more specific for the ceremonial of application for admission to the king's service. The author enumerates several considerations concerning the cut, the color and the fabric of the coat and the shirts that should be worn by the candidate. All shall display luxury and costliness. In connection with these reflections, the *Konungs Skuggsía* also devotes a whole chapter to the mantle and the reason why one should not wear a mantle when seeking an audience with the king. One reason concerns security, as a mantle could hide weapons. The chief reason given however is that in presenting himself without a mantle, the candidate expresses his submission to the king and to the *hirð* as well. The act of not wearing a mantle is an act of servitude.¹¹⁷ We see again that in the presence of the king specific dress codes apply, which contribute to establishing an asymmetric relationship with the courtier.

Remarkably enough, there is no trace in our source material about the clothes a king should wear at court, although we can assume that he probably wore the best fabric and the most expensive textiles. As it will be noted later, our documents are also surprisingly silent about the items that symbolized royal authority in daily practice. Regalia are very seldom mentioned outside the context of solemn rituals or ceremonies. However, during the ceremony of vassalage, the king shall receive the homage with the coronation sword on his knee if he is crowned.¹¹⁸

113 *Lsp*, Vol II. Title V, Law V; Title XXI, Law XVIII.

114 *Klæð þik væl oc þo sua at æigi virðizt oðrum mannum til þrambs* (*Hsk*, Ch. 29).

115 *haga klæðum sinum bæðe at lit oc aðrum lutum sva* (*Kgs*, Ch. XL).

116 «It shows good breeding to be cleanly in food and clothes», *Þat e roc siðgæðe at hafa sec reinliga hvartyæggia at mat ocklæðum* (*Ibid.*).

117 *Kgs*, Ch. XXXI.

118 *Hsk*, Ch. 31.

Control over dress at court does not seem to have diminished over time. Indeed, under the reign of King Håkon Magnusson (1299–1319), courtiers' interest in clothes and taste for foreign fashions reached a level which truly challenged royal control over dress at court, to the extent that the king felt necessary to remind the nobility of his authority in the field with an ordinance.¹¹⁹

Table Code

Courtly culture flourished in meals and banquets as well. Good behavior and manners were revealed particularly during meals. Books of manners dedicated great attention to behavior at table and in Germany we can find specific treatises about proper eating habits called *Tischzuchten*.¹²⁰

Eating and drinking were crucial moments in the functioning of the *hirð* as a group and in the shaping of its relationship with the king. Generosity and prodigality were important way for the king to gain the loyalty of his men. We pointed earlier to the problem of drunkenness among courtiers. From a courteous point of view, excess in drinking was considered a lack of control. In the pre-state/pre-court society, excess in drinking and eating responded to standard norms and values.

Rituals were set out in relation to eating and drinking. First, the table played a determining role in the *hirð* and its hierarchic organization. The retinue was in fact divided into two groups: those who were *borðfastir*, "had a permanent place at the king's table," that is, the members of the *hirð* who were by the king at the court, and the other officers who were stationed in districts. The *hirð* used to share the meals with the king and occasionally with his guests. The organization of meals as described in the *Konungs Skuggsía* was a complex and extremely ritualized affair. The entering of the king's hall for dinner was processional: the *hirð* men walking two by two to their appointed seating place.¹²¹ Again, temperance was a basic principle for meals. While the author frequently condemns drunkenness at court, he specifically bans excesses in eating and drinking while eating in presence of the king.¹²² The *Hirðskrá* made moderation in drinking a permanent element of the rules for life at court. In the chapter dedicated to good manners, the text warns retainers against drunkenness "because from it many

119 DN XI nr. 6.

120 Elias 2000, 72–107.

121 *Kgs*, Ch. XXXVII.

122 *Kgs*, Ch. XL.

lose health and understanding, wealth and friends, but last but not least the soul is destroyed when the drunkard cannot take care of himself, neither of God nor of good men.”¹²³ The meal itself proceeds in close connection to the king’s eating and the *Konungs Skuggsía* strongly advises *hirð* men not to lag behind when the king is finished. In particular he tells them to notice when the king is drinking, because the men of the *hirð* must not eat while the king is drinking.¹²⁴

Seating arrangements reflected the hierarchy within the *hirð* and strengthened the pre-eminence of the king. The power relations underlying the table organization and manners are exemplified in the rituals by which different members of the *hirð* were appointed to specific offices. Some of the most important offices within the *hirð* were given out during the meal when eating. Thus the offices of *lendmenn* and *stallar* were announced by the king when the whole *hirð* was around the table, after the blessings and before everybody was seated.¹²⁵ The function of *Skutilsveinr*, which literally meant table-man, was also appointed at a ceremony during the meal. The cup-bearer called the candidate forth after the king was finished eating and drinking, but was still seated at the table. A cup with a lock was then placed on the table in front of the king, who held it out to the future officer.¹²⁶

Control over Oral Communication at Court

The works of Pierre Bourdieu have epitomized the relationship between power, language and social control. According to Bourdieu, the imposition of an official language is an essential part of the process of state formation. State power succeeds in establishing a standard and normalized language, which then becomes the legitimate language for all oral communication. Ultimately it consolidates the state’s symbolic domination over society: control over the means of communication also ascribes the state control over the content of communication.¹²⁷ The establishing of a unique norm for language is thus one of the processes of concentration and standardization which characterizes state-formation. The codification of speech at court was thus a crucial element in its control by the crown. In a society where oral communication was still

123 *Þat nest at þu gæter þín frá ofðryckiu. þúi at af hænni tapar margr hæilsunni bæðe oc vitinu. fe oc felogum oc þúi siðazt sem mæst er at salen er tynð þar sem þrúkkinn maðr ma æigi sialfs sins giæta. oc æigi guðs ne goðra manna* (*Hsk*, Ch. 28).

124 *Kgs*, Ch. xxxvii.

125 *Hsk*, Chs. 13 and 17.

126 *Hsk*, Ch. 19.

127 Bourdieu 1991, 37–65.

the dominant mode of communication, control over words and over the circumstances in which and places where they were uttered was essential for control.

Elegance in speech and eloquence were central elements of courtliness. This involved the usage of specific words and expressions at the proper times and to specific addressees. Foreign languages or expressions were also considered a mark of refinement. Thus speaking French or even only some French words was considered particularly genteel in most European courts in the 12th and 13th centuries.¹²⁸ In Norway, the *Konungs Skuggsía* also mentions French as a language one should master.¹²⁹ We know little about the aristocratic lay elite's acquaintance with French. Generally speaking, Norwegian courtiers' knowledge of foreign languages was very limited and foreign courtly literature in Old French or English was systematically translated into Old Norse. We know virtually nothing of the degree of refinement of speech at the Norwegian court, but the *Konungs Skuggsía* illustrates a wish to introduce courtly speech among the king's retainers.

The author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* counts *orðhæghi oc snilld*, "elegance in speech and eloquence," as the main qualities of courtiers.¹³⁰ In direct line with the general principles of courtliness, courtiers are required to observe temperance when they speak at court. Thus in their conversations courtiers are strongly advised to show discretion and control. Verbosity is thus considered a cardinal sin and the quality of foolish men. Courtiers should express themselves in concise terms. Brevity is a quality that distinguishes the skillful orator from foolish men. It can also save poor speakers from being ridiculous or, worst of all, from bringing dishonor to their king.¹³¹ Similarly, the *Hirðskrá* condemns "slander or false flattery" as well as "cursing, blasphemes and all kinds of dirty talk."¹³² In contrast, it counts "moderation in words" as part of honorable behavior.¹³³

The rules of speech consolidated/reflected social rank between the king and his men of the *hirð*. Indeed, the king's personal presence is pivotal in the way conversation should unfold at court. In presence of the king, courtiers shall

128 Bumke 2000, 85–88.

129 *Kgs*, Ch. III.

130 *Kgs*, Ch. XL.

131 *Kgs*, Ch. XXXIV.

132 *bakmæle eða lygileg fagrmæle, ryglæik oc uglæði sorg oc anger* (*Hsk*, Ch. 28).

133 *æinorð* (*Hsk*, Ch. 29).

cease their conversation in order to be fully attentive to the king's speech: "keep carefully in mind, while in the king's presence, that you ought not to engage in conversation with other men and thus fail to pay heed to everything that the king says."¹³⁴ The author lays out clear and practical strategies to help courtiers to end their conversation with their companions; for instance, he gives clear answers on how to put an end to a conversation with somebody who refuses to give in.

Conversations with the king also followed definite rules, the first of which being to always pay attention to the king's speech. Again, practical advice is provided to help the courtier in the embarrassing event that he missed the king's questions. Courtiers were urged not to say *haa*, "Eh!" or *hvát*, "What?," but on the contrary to use the honorable *hærra*, "Sire" or the longer but more refined, "My Lord, be not offended if I ask what you said to me, but I did not quite catch it."¹³⁵ Responses to the king should be concise and clear in order not to waste his time. In practice this meant that unprepared declarations were discarded, making of the participation of the courtier in his dialogue with his lord a controlled and formalized act, leaving no place for spontaneous and disrespectful interjections. The choice of terminology in addressing the king also established a relation of power with the courtier. Indeed, the author spends considerable space and energy teaching his son about when and why to use the plural form in addressing the king or other princes. In addressing the king, courtiers shall use the plural form "thou," which is said to be the prerogative of princes. The introduction of a specific terminology marking social rank contributed to transforming the dialogue between the prince and his courtier into a process of domination. The plural form distinguished the king from his courtiers.

We cannot really determine how these manners of speech were received, but some elements suggest that the author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* was confronted with a difficult task. This is reflected in the necessity to provide courtiers with highly precise practical examples of what should not be said or not. This necessity implies a quite low starting point. The examples of utterances which were forbidden also can give a good idea of what the actual practices of speech at court were.

134 *Þat skalt þu oc vandliga leiða at huga mæðan þu stændr firi konongi at þu ræðer æcki við aðra menn mæðan sva at þu gefir æigi goðan gaum at ollu því sæm konongr talar* (*Kgs*, Ch. XXXII).

135 *hærra minn latið yðr æigi firi þikkia at ec spyria hvat þer mælltur til min því at ec nam æi gorla* (*Ibid.*).

Courtiers as Means of Communication

Courtiers and Corteges

The *hirð* was not only a target for royal communication. It also assisted the king in his communication and became the very means of his communication. Through their physical appearance and discipline, royal retainers played a fundamental role in the display of royal power. For instance, the author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* teaches retainers about escort arrangements.

Now when it happens that the king goes out to seek diversion, whether it be in town or in the country, or wherever he is sojourning, and you and your comrades accompany him, the retinue looks best, whether you are armed or not, if you walk in equal numbers on either side of the king, though never in compact groups. Wherever you go he should walk in your midst, and you and your companions should be arranged in equal numbers before and behind him and on either side. [...] But when the king rides out for amusement and you and your comrades accompany him, arrange the order of riding in the way that I have suggested about your walking.¹³⁶

Retainers thus had the duty to organize themselves with great care in a procession around the king when he was outside his apartments. The escort had to be organized symmetrically so as to leave a strong impression on townsmen or whoever should happen to see it. The performance and the impression that radiated from the escort ultimately enhanced the one who was the very center of the escort, the king himself.

The *Hirðskrá* also comes with clear recommendations which illustrate how thoroughly codified the train of the king was outside the locus of the court. While the *Konungs Skuggsía* seems to give an indication of spontaneous occasions, the *Hirðskrá* depicts with great detail the organization of the suite for well-prepared events. The liegemen that were chosen for the escort are to come early, wearing their best clothes and weapons. The group shall follow the

136 *Nu bærr sua at konongr gengr at skemta ser hvart sœm þat er ikaup stað eða i heraðe eða hvar sœm hann er staddr oc fylgir þu hanum of þiner lagunautar hvært sœm þer erut uapnæder eða uapnlausar þa er sva fægrrst fylgð yður at þer ganger iammarger a hvara tuæggia lið hanum oc þo hvarger mæð balluttum flocki. Æfnit sua til at hann uærði imiðiu yðru forunuti staddr þar sœm þer ganget oc þer uærðer iam marger a hvara tuæggia lið hanum eða fram i fra hanum [...] En æf konongr riðr at skemta se roc fylger þu hanum oc þinir logunautar þa hattet hina somu lunnd reið yðarri sœm ec hæfi aðr sagt um gongu yðra (Kgs, Ch. XXXVII).*

king everywhere he goes, and four of them shall take their place around the king for his protection.¹³⁷

On several occasions, the author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* stresses that the *hirð* and its retainers were a showcase for the Norwegian crown to foreign rulers. Although direct encounters remained rare between rulers in Europe, increasing contacts are attested. While King Håkon's growing contacts with the English, French, and Castilian kings or with the German emperors never lead to direct meetings, he occasionally met the kings of Sweden and Denmark directly. When this happened, the encounter was always an opportunity for the Norwegian kings to display their power and grandeur. In the spring of 1249, King Håkon travelled from Oslo to meet the Swedish king Eric XI and Earl Birger at the traditional place of the Göta River. The arrival of Håkon's fleet was a show of military strength as much as a display of the king's majesty.

When the king passed out along the Göta River he made them take great pains with the rowing on board his ships. Then all the crew was called into play and the fleet passed on with all pomp.¹³⁸

Sturla does not mention whether the Swedes were impressed or not, but he emphasized the episode in the saga by adding a long skaldic poem that exalted the magnificence and order of the procession.¹³⁹

Most frequently, diplomatic exchanges occurred via emissaries and envoys coming to the court. According to the *Konungs Skuggsía*, the impression left by the court was decisive in the appreciation of the prince. The exemplariness of courtiers' conduct is frequently referred to as a central element in the king's communication with foreigners:

Wherever the kingsmen are much in the eyes of other men, whether they sit together at a feast, or walk in the king's escort, or go out together to make merry, they ought always to speak in rather low tones, to be proper in their actions and elegant in their speech, and to avoid all indecent talk.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ *Hsk*, Ch. 32.

¹³⁸ *þa er hakon konungr for ut eptir elfinni. let hann vanda miök roðr a skipunum. var þa við flegit öllum bunaði ok farit með hínnum mefsta pris.* (*HsH*, Ch. 266).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Hvart sœm konongs mœnn ero stadder isamsæti eða ero þeir ifylgh mæð konongi eða ganga þeir aller saman til sinnar skemtunar þar sœm þeir værða mioc firi aughum annarra manna þa æigu þeir iamnan hælldr at væra ilioðara lagi oc sið pruder i latæðe sino faghryrðer oc sia við allu saurmæli* (*Kgs*, Ch. xxxvii).

For the author there is no doubt that the conduct of retainers had direct consequences for the reputation of the king abroad.

It also frequently happens that well trained envoys from other lands come to visit the king and his court; and the more polished they are, the more carefully they observe the royal service as well as the manners of the king and his courtiers and all the customs that prevail at the court. On returning to their own lands, they will describe the customs and relate the happenings, which they saw or heard at the court to which they were sent. But all the rumors that travels to other lands and are circulated about a lord, if they be truthful, will usually either bring him ridicule and contumely or be turned to his honor. It may also frequently come to pass that the kings themselves need to meet in conference to discuss such rules and the kingdoms must keep arrangements as jointly. Wherever kings meet, there the best men are always assembled; for the kings bring their chief men with them to such conferences: archbishops, bishops, earls, landedmen, and hirdmen or knights. And the conduct and breeding of those who assemble are carefully noted, first the manners of the mighty ones, and then those of all the rest; for everyone watches closely the behavior of all the others. And if one of the kings or one of his principal men is found indecorous, he soon becomes the subject of ridicule and contempt and is regarded as a common churl. And if a king's retinue is found to be poorly trained and is lacking in polish, especially if the service of the king's apartments is not performed in a comely and proper manner, then the king himself is pronounced unfit; for it will be held that if he himself were polite and perfect in manners, all would acquire good breeding from him.¹⁴¹

This rather long excerpt illustrates how retainers were a decisive element in the king's communication with princes. Whether courtiers followed the Norwegian king in his encounters with foreign rulers or whether they welcomed foreign

141 *Sua kann oc optliga til at bæra at houæsker sænndemænn af øðrum lonndum komi til konongs funndar of hans hirðar oc hyggia þar þui gorr at hans þionosto oc houærski hans oc hans hirðar oc allum siðum ihans hirð er þeir ero sialfir houæskare. Oc æf þeir koma heim aprt til sins lannz þa sægia þeir slicu siðu oc all annur tiðænde sæm þeir sa eða hæyrðu mæð þeim konongi er þa uaru þeir til sænnder. En oll þau tiðænnde er til annarna lannda koma. oc flytiaz um hofðingia oc uærða þau mæð sonnu flutt. Þa er þat optazt at þau snuaz annat hvart til haðs of gabs eða til sæmðar. Þat kann oc optliga til hannda at bæra at konongar þurfu sialfir at finnaz oc tala um skipan oc sætning þa er uæra a lannda þæirra amædal oc*

envoys at court, the conduct and appearance of the retinue largely contributed to shape the royal image in foreign courts. Bad manners directly impacted on the king and the author makes explicit that great punishments await those who bring dishonor to their lord. The ultimate achievement of the strategy of domestication of the aristocracy was thus to make royal retainers, by their conduct and organization, an essential back-up to the king's communication with society.

Courtiers and the Kings in Majesty

The organization of corteges and princely processions which the courtiers organized around their kings were performances meant to convey strength and authority. As we have seen, there were also obvious aesthetic considerations. The appearances of courtiers, their clothes, armour and weapons were to exude elegance and prestige. Courtiers as group also could fulfil another theatrical function in the iconography of royal rituals. In 1195 and 1233, the Norwegian kings judged for felony two of the highest princes in the realm. The two episodes share many similarities. Each time, the kings unfolded an elaborate and highly dramatic court of justice in the royal palace, which aimed at lauding royal authority and aristocratic submission. The staging of the court was structured around the image of the king in his majesty, in which the royal *hirð* played a decisive role.

In the summer of 1195, the king summoned an assembly in Bergen to judge Harald Maddadson, Earl of Orkney, for his participation to the Eyjarskeggjar Uprising. The meeting was in fact not a tribunal, but was meant to display the king's justice.¹⁴² The assembly was organized as a public event in the open air of Christ Church yard. Present were the king and his *hirð*, the earl and his followers. Speeches were made. First came Harald's, in which he recognized his culpability and committed his fate into the hands of his lord. Afterwards he

uærðr þat iamnan hinna bæztu manna samfunndr þar sæm konongar æigu stæfnur sínar. Þa koma mæð þeim til stæfnu höfðingiar þeira ærkibyskopar iarlar oc liod byskopar lænndr mænn of hirðmænn oc riddarar oc uærðr þa uannðliga at hugt houæsku eða siðum allra þeira. er þar koma saman. hinna riku fyst oc þui næst allra annarra þui at þar skygnir huærr um annars at hæfi. Oc æf funning uærðr ainn hværr kononganna u houæskr. eða æinn hværr höfðingia annarra þa uærðr sa þægar firi spotti oc haðe oc sua halldenn sæm ainn hværr þorpari. Oc þo at hirð æins hværs konongs uærðe funnden u houæsk eða æigi uel siðugh eða allra hællzt æf þionosta hans uærðr æigi houæskliga eða mæð fogrum siðum fram flutt ihans hærþærgi. Þa uærðr dæmðr uhouæskr konongr sialfr. oc kalla sua aller æf hann uæri houæskr sialfr eða uel siðughr at þa munndu aller siðazc ah honum (Kgs, Ch. xxix).

142 SvS, Ch. 125.

went to the king's seat and knelt before him. Then Sverre held a speech in which he reiterated the accusations of treason against the earl that this latter had repented and that he had begged for the king's mercy, which Sverre now was ready to grant him.¹⁴³ In the end, the Orkneys and the Shetland were confiscated and Harald was reinstalled as Earl of Orkney but limited power. Some forty years later, Earl Skule found himself in very similar situation. The agreement of 1223 which had regulated the sharing of the kingdom between King Håkon and Earl Skule was crumbling. Dissatisfaction grew and although the *Håkonar saga* only tells of Skule's manoeuvres, we can assume that both sides plotted against each other. In the summer of 1233 however, King Håkon summoned the earl to Bergen in order to confront him with accusations of treachery. King Håkon and Earl Skule had discussed the affair earlier during a close encounter and the ceremonial that was set up was only meant to display the earl's submission to the king.¹⁴⁴ The court of justice was organized in the courtyard of the royal palace. During an oration, King Håkon repeated the accusations against his earl who refuted them. The rupture was complete and they departed as enemies.

In both cases, the speeches held during the courts of justice were very important in the confrontation between the kings and their vassals. As Orning makes clear, the king's wrath and mercy were a powerful means of obtaining submission.¹⁴⁵ However, in both cases, the staging of the ceremony was also decisive and a full understanding of the event is only possible when the words and doings of the actors are placed in their ritualistic context. In 1195 and 1233, the staging of the ceremony was set up around the king's throne (*konungsfætir*) and his *hirð*. In 1195 the king's high seat was brought outside and Sverre sat on it while Earl Harald confessed his guilt and when he himself held his speech. The royal *hirð* was arranged around the king while he sat on his throne.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, in 1233 during King Håkon's justice, "there was a throne set under the king, and he sat on it, and around him stood his liegemen and councillors."¹⁴⁷ The symbolic value of the throne as a mark of domination was further strengthened by the fact that the earl was refused a seat during the encounter.¹⁴⁸ The

143 *Ibid.*

144 *HsH*, Ch. 177.

145 Orning 2008, 311 ff.

146 *SvS*, Ch. 125.

147 *var þar stóll settr undir konúnginn, ok sátu umhverfis hann lendir menn hans ok ráðgjafar* (*HsH*, Ch. 177).

148 *Ibid.*

absence of seat was meant to force Skule to stand in front of King Håkon. However, the earl could not tolerate being placed on a subordinate level and asked his men to find another chair for him.¹⁴⁹

The image of the king sitting on his throne and surrounded by his retinue was one of the most solemn representation of the sovereign: the king in majesty.¹⁵⁰ This image referred to the Christian image of “Majestas Domini” or Christ in Majesty, seated on his throne as ruler of the world. Christ in Majesty was largely an iconographic representation that was found in abundance in Christian liturgy, in particular in the tympanum of 12th century churches,¹⁵¹ but also occurred in royal iconography.¹⁵² In this image, Christ was not alone. He was flanked by his court of apostles, in particular Saint Peter and Saint Paul. In Christian theology, the figure of Christ in Majesty was more particularly associated with Christ in Judgement separating the souls of the sinners from those of the righteous during the Last Judgement. It is striking that in their administration of justice to their highest vassals, the Norwegian kings endeavoured to recreate the symbolism of Christ judging the sinners, flanked not by apostles, but instead by their closest supporters, their courtiers. The kings of Norway were simply meting out justice on earth as Christ did in heaven. The staging of the court of justice was a dramaturgical act expressing great solemnity and clearly was organized to emphasize hierarchical order and the king’s authority as judge. The juxtaposition of these images clearly offered the kings a decisive advantage over their vassals.

The *Hirðskrá* reflects on the symbolic importance of the high seat (*hasæte*) in the establishing of royal authority. The staging of the *konungstekja* places the high seat at the centre of the ritual of kingmaking at the *þing*:

Attractively prepared high-seats shall be set up there. One of them, however, shall be higher and finer than the rest and placed in the middle, and no one shall sit in it. The prospective king shall sit it on the steps down in

149 *Ibid.*

150 Dominique Alibert. 2006. “Images de la majesté sacrée: La mutation de l’an mille a-t-elle eu lieu?” in G. Constable & M. Ruche (red.) *Auctoritas. Mélanges offerts au professeur Olivier Guillot*. Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne: 423–435; Guenée 1971, 142–150.

151 Anne-Orange Poilpré. 2005. *Maiestas Domini. Une image de l’Église en Occident (Ve–IXe siècle)*. Paris, Editions du Cerf; P. Skubiszewski. 2005. “Maiestas Domini et liturgie.” in Cl. Arrignon, M.-H. Debiès, Cl. Galderisi et É. Palazzo (éd.) *Cinquante années d’études médiévales. À la confluence de nos disciplines*. Actes du colloque organisé à l’occasion du cinquantième du CÉSCM. Poitiers, le 1er– 4 septembre 2003. Turnhout: 309–408.

152 Anne-Orange Poilpré. 2004. “Charles le Chauve trônant et la Maiestas Domini. Réflexion à propos de trois manuscrits.” *Histoire de l’Art*, N° 55 Octobre 2004: 45–54.

front of the highest high-seat, and the other noblemen shall sit in the other high-seats flanking him.¹⁵³

The seat of the king was distinctive through its position and refinement, and aimed at displaying royal domination over the nobility. Later in the ritual, the high-seat played a decisive role in the enthroning of the new king who was lift up into the high-seat.¹⁵⁴ The high-seat symbolized the crown and in taking place on it, the candidate was invested with the royal office.

Later in the *Hirðskrá*, the designation of duke and earl followed a ritual in which the high seat also was central in the definition of the power hierarchy. Once the duke was designated, the king would take his hand and would seat him in his high seat.¹⁵⁵ In contrast to the duke, once he had designated his earl, the king led him to a high seat which was little distant from his.¹⁵⁶ The ceremonial difference marked a real political and legal difference between the duke and the earl. In sharing the high seat with the king, the duke was elevated to an equal rank in terms of authority and power. By contrast, the marked distinction of a separate seat clearly emphasized the position of the earl as subordinate to the king.¹⁵⁷

When Size Matters...

The increasing role of retainers in the display of royal power was accompanied by a growing awareness that the size of escorts composed of retainers needed to be controlled. It was nothing less than royal prestige and authority that was at stake. The size of the royal retinue varied significantly in the 11th and 12th centuries. King Olav Haraldsson is believed to have had sixty men. King Olav Kyrre (c. 1050–1093) had around 120 men.¹⁵⁸ The law of Trondelag (*Grágás*) limited the retinue of the archbishops to thirty men. As a group of professional warriors, the number of men of the *hirð* had direct implications for the military capacity of a lord. In 1191 in the midst of his conflict with Archbishop Eirik, King Sverre complained at the *þing* that Eirik possessed an entourage exceeding the

153 *Par skulu hasæte buin vera sǫmelega en þo skal æitt bæðe hææst oc bæzt buit vera .i. miðiu oc skal þar ængi .i. sæitiaz. en konongs æfni skal sitia niðri a. graðunom firi hinu hæsta hasæte.* (*Hsk*, Ch. 5).

154 *Ibid.*

155 *Hsk*, Ch. 12.

156 *Hsk*, Ch. 16.

157 G.A. Blom. 1972. *Samkongedømme – Enekongedømme – Hákon Magnussons Hertugdømme.* Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab, Skrifter No. 18, Universitetsforlaget: 35–36.

158 «*Hirð* », by Lars Hamre, in *KLNM* Vol. VI.: 571–572.

size fixed by law.¹⁵⁹ King Magnus the Lawmender attempted to gain stricter control over the size of *hirðs* and, what was new, the size of princely escorts. The size of the bishop's *hirð* was a major issue in the 1270s. Through the concordat of Tønsberg in 1277, Archbishop Jon obtained from the king the permission to have a *hirð* of 100 men exempt from royal military duties.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, the bishops of Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger and Hamar were allowed to have a retinue of forty men free from military service.¹⁶¹ The agreement did not refer to any size limitations for episcopal escorts. The *Hirðskrá* or law of the retinue also aimed at strictly regulating the size of the lendmenn's *hirð*,¹⁶² particularly the duke's *hirð*: "[The duke] shall not have more liegemen than the king and men of wisdom deem appropriate."¹⁶³

The law was even more specific when it comes to the size of the earl's escort which was limited to four men in presence of the king and to six in his absence.¹⁶⁴

The use of the entourage for defence purposes is here only one minor aspect of the escort's function. Its size is viewed in relation to authority. As subject of the king, in any circumstances the earl must have a weaker escort than his lord. This limited the prestige and authority which the earl could draw from his men when he travelled in the kingdom. It was *a fortiori* the case when the earl was in presence of the king. The size of the escort visually signalled the earl's subordination to his king. In any case, the escort of the king had to be the greatest, conferring on him the utmost prestige and authority.

6 Domesticating the Mind: Kings, Courtiers and Courtly Literature

The preceding chapter explored how the kingship implemented courtly etiquette and new norms for physical behavior in the aristocracy through codes of conduct as a means to achieve control over the aristocracy. This strategy did not limit itself to the modeling of outward behavior, but had its counterpart in the forming of minds. If presence at court was a prerequisite for physical control through rituals and exposition to perfect behavior through observation, it also

¹⁵⁹ SvS, Ch. 117.

¹⁶⁰ NgL 11, 468.

¹⁶¹ *Item cuilibet episcoporum videlicet asloensi. bergensi. stafangrensi. hamarensi secundum modum predictum concessit homines .xl.* (NgL 11, 468).

¹⁶² Hsk, Ch. 19.

¹⁶³ *Eigi skal han oc flæiri handgengna mæn hava en konongr oc vitrir mæn sia at til hæyriri.* Hsk, Chs. 13 and 17.

¹⁶⁴ Hsk, Ch. 13.

offered the kingship the necessary conditions for implementing values and norms strengthening subordination and loyalty in the aristocracy through the written word.

Kings and Courtiers

The Era of the Learned Kings

The novelty of the court lay in the values and norms shared by its members. Under the rule of King Håkon Håkonsson and his heirs, the Norwegian kings embodied a new model of culture and of conduct which would serve as model of emulation for the lay courtiers: they were learned, wise, and cultivated.

This ideal was widespread in the great European monarchies of the 13th century and most rulers were hailed for their wisdom and learning. It was a time when kings readily received patronyms emphasizing this new dimension of their power: The Castilian king Alfonso X acquired the name of *el Sabio*, “the learned” or “the wise.”¹⁶⁵ The German Emperor Frederick II was known as *stupor mundi*, “the wonder of the world,” a name which praised his cultural attainments.¹⁶⁶ Although the names of the French King Louis IX or of King Henry III of England did not indicate their wisdom and knowledge, they were both recognized for their outstanding culture and their contributions to science, poetry, literature and art.¹⁶⁷ This ideal was widely broadcast in the literary genre of Mirrors of Princes, such as *Policraticus* (c. 1159) by John of Salisbury, who considered that “without wisdom no government can be strong enough to endure or even to exist”¹⁶⁸ and that it was “crystal clear how necessary is a knowledge of letters to princes.”¹⁶⁹ The maxim that “An illiterate king is a crowned ass,” from the *Deeds of the English Kings* written around 1120 by William of Malmesbury, was repeatedly quoted in several works in the late 12th and 13th century. The Castilian *Las Siete Partidas* (1251–65) made learning a prerequisite to good rule; “A king should be eager to learn sciences, for, by means of them, he will understand the affairs of sovereigns and will better know how to act with regard to them.”¹⁷⁰

165 Robert I. Burns. (ed.) 1990. *Emperor of Culture: Alfonso X the Learned of Castile and His Thirteenth-Century Renaissance*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

166 Abulafia 1992.

167 Jacques Le Goff. 2009. *Saint Louis*. University of Notre Dame Press: 461 ff.

168 *Nec mirum, cum sine sapientia nullus stare aut esse ualeat principatus quia sapientia*, (Ps, Vol. IV Ch. 6).

169 *Ex quibus liquido constat quam necessaria sit principibus peritia litterarum*, (Ps, Vol. IV Ch. 6).

170 *acucioso debe el rey seer en aprender los sabers, cap or ellos entendera las cosas de raiz; et sabrá mejor obrar en ellas* (*Lsp*, Part II, Tit. V, L. XVI).

We have seen that King Sverre held a central position in the making of a royal communication system. His case however spread confusion with regards to the image of the learned king. King Sverre had received his education as priest. He thus could read and probably write Latin. From the prologue of the *Sverris saga* we also know that he contributed to its redaction, but to which degree we still do not know. We suggested too that he was involved in the writing of the anti-clerical pamphlet *A speech against the bishops*. Yet his posthumous portrait in his biography does not lay emphasis on his intellectual qualities. The *Sverris saga* as a whole in no ways develops the ideal of the learned king. One sole reference to the importance of literacy for kings can be found in the *Speech*. In the part about the validity of privileges given by earlier kings, the author invokes the Scriptures to deny the possibility for kings to concede rights given by God. If this has been done, he argues, it must have been because "Kings have been so ignorant as not to know these written commands (Scriptures)."¹⁷¹ It seems thus that in the late 12th century Norwegian rulers were expected to have a good knowledge of the Bible.

However, it was during the following century that knowledge and culture were to become inherent parts of royal qualities. The ideal of the learned king is thus well represented in the *Konungs Skuggsía*. Among the duties of the king the author lists that of seeking *manvit oc froðlaic*, "knowledge and understanding."¹⁷² Later he stresses that "no man needs to be more learned or better informed in all subjects than a king."¹⁷³ The kind of knowledge our author refers to is historical. The king "ought indeed to be well informed as to what has occurred in the past, for in that way he will gain insight for all the business that pertains to his kingship."¹⁷⁴ Later, it is again judged that a king should have "a thorough knowledge of past events [...] to seek guidance for the government of his kingdom."¹⁷⁵

Throughout Western Europe, the Biblical King Solomon was the paradigm of the wise and learned king and the model which all great monarchs sought to emulate. In *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury depicted Solomon as the well-educated king *par excellence* and a model of instruction for royal heirs.¹⁷⁶

171 *konongar være sua fafrodri at þeir vissi eigi þæssar Ritningar* (HO 14, 16–17).

172 *Kgs*, Ch. XLIII.

173 *ængi maðr etti at væra marghfroðari eða vitrari um alla luti en konongr* (*Kgs*, Ch. XLV).

174 *ahann vist at væra marghfroðr um oll dæmi þau er verit hava. at hann mægi þaðan skilning af taca til allrar stiornar. þeirar er hann þarf at hava isinum konongdomi* (*Kgs*, Ch. XLIII).

175 *En sa sœm allfroðr [...] þaðan af þau morc hœnda hværsu hann skal sinu ríki stiorna* (*Kgs*, Ch. XLV).

176 *Ps*, IV, 6.

He inspired several monarchs such as the Castilian King Alfonso X (1252–84) and the Capetian Louis IX.¹⁷⁷ The *Konungs Skuggsía* reveals that, just like for the other “modern” rulers of Europe, King Solomon was the model of the learned king in Norway too. In the *Konungs Skuggsía* no less than four chapters are dedicated to Solomon. Each illustrates the severity of his justice and in particular the wisdom of his judgments.¹⁷⁸

More than with any other Norwegian king, this image of learned prince was associated with King Håkon from his very childhood, something his saga seems to have cultivated happily. It seems that the king received an advanced intellectual education. It is said that when the young Håkon was seven, Earl Håkon “put him to book learning.”¹⁷⁹ At the age of thirteen, when the Birkebeiners looked for him to hail him as king, he was found at the Cathedral school of Nidaros.¹⁸⁰ We have no exact knowledge of the level of his erudition, but from accounts of his last days we know that King Håkon knew Latin, as he commanded Latin books be read aloud to him.¹⁸¹ His skills in Latin were probably very limited though, and the saga suggests that he had problems with understanding it perfectly. However, Matthew Paris, an English chronicler who had sojourned in Norway, praised King Håkon for his knowledge and depicted him as *vir discretus et modestus e bene litteratus*, “a discreet, modest and perfectly literate man.” To illustrate this, Matthew Paris mentioned in his chronicle that King Håkon cited the Roman poet Lucan.¹⁸² Håkon was also renowned for his taste for literature, a result of his education and of his life at the court of Earl Håkon.¹⁸³ On his deathbed, King Håkon is said to have had the histories of the Norwegian kings read out loud to him.¹⁸⁴

Håkon's sons and heirs also enjoyed a learned reputation. They probably received their education at school and at the court like their father. There are good reasons to believe that the *Konungs Skuggsía* was written at the command of King Håkon to instruct his heirs, his sons Håkon (b. 1232) and Magnus (b. 1238). In their father's saga, Sturla depicts Håkon the Young as the perfect knight,

177 Le Goff 2009, 307–309, 478–479; Jean-Patrice Boudet. 2008. “Le modèle du roi sage aux XIII et XVI siècles: Salomon, Alphonse X et Charles V.” *Revue Historique*, Vol. 310, Fasc. 3 (647): 545–566.

178 *Kgs*, Chs. LXIV, LXV, LXVI and LXVII.

179 *liet* [...] *setia hann tul Bokar* (*HsH*, Ch. 5).

180 *HsH*, Ch. 13.

181 *HsH*, Ch. 331.

182 *CM*, Vol IV, 650–651.

183 *HsH*, Ch. 332.

184 *HsH*, Ch. 337.

“skilled in fence, and in all things the nimblest of men; the best horseman of all those who were in Norway.”¹⁸⁵ In his chronicle Matthew Paris lamented the death of King Håkon the Young (1255) who had been “a remarkable and promising teenager.”¹⁸⁶ Håkon’s second son, the future King Magnus the Lawmender, was also praised for his intellectual capacities. In the *Hákonar saga*, Sturla laid emphasis on the precocity of King Magnus’ intelligence, reporting how his first speech at the age of fourteen “much astonished men how clever the speech was.”¹⁸⁷ Later kings seem also to have been learned. According to the *Lanercost Chronicle*, King Eirik Magnusson could speak English and French, and according to the *Laurentius saga Biskup* (§ 16), his brother Duke Håkon spoke Latin.¹⁸⁸

However, the ideal of the cultivated prince did not fully reach 13th century Norway. In royal sagas, the portrait of the Norwegian kings seems to have remained faithful to the traditional saga genre. King Håkon’s posthumous portrait in *Hákonar saga* remains silent on his culture and intellectual capacities but instead praises his good looks and character as well as his manners and eloquence.¹⁸⁹ Duke Skule, who had been one if not the most powerful of princes in Norway, also was portrayed as a great orator, generous, courteous and polished.¹⁹⁰ This resistance to the European model illustrates that European cultural standards were not blindly adopted, but were adapted to the local culture. It may also reflect the real level of intellectual culture of the Norwegian princes. Behind the ideals lay a reality, which maybe was far away from European standards.

Kings and Queens as Commissioners of Literature

The interest of princes in learning and culture in Europe was reflected in their activities of patronage. In the 12th and 13th century, Plantagenet, Capetian, and Castilian kings commissioned writers and artists to use their skills for the exaltation of royal power. The Plantagenet court of Henry II, Richard I and Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine welcomed official writers, troubadours and poets who played a decisive role in the birth of courtly romances.¹⁹¹ The patronage of

185 *uel fyrrkr madr ok manna fimaztur ok liettaztur aa fier. Allra manna best heftær þeira fem þa uoru j noregi* (HsH, Ch. 288).

186 *Haco, adolescens speciosus* (CM, Vol. v 651).

187 *mikit vm huerfu fníallt erendi þat var* (HsH, Ch. 278).

188 NLH, 488.

189 HsH, Ch. 332.

190 HsH, Ch. 242.

191 Aurell 2007, 84 ff; Amaury Chauou 2001, 30–125; J. Gillingham. 2006. « The Cultivation of History, Legends and Courtesy at the Court of Henry II ». In R. Kennedy and S. Meecham-Jones

Marie, Countess of Champagne, was pivotal in the making of Arthurian literature in welcoming and providing for its founder, Chrétien of Troyes.¹⁹² In France, King Louis IX commissioned from Vincent of Beauvais his *Speculum maius*, which was to be highly successful in most European courts.¹⁹³ For the education of his heir, Philip III commanded a French translation of Aegidius Colonna's *De regimine principum*.¹⁹⁴ At the turn of the 14th century, Philip IV commissioned Joinville to write his grandfather's *vita* (*Livre des saintes paroles et des bons faiz de nostre saint roy Loöys*).¹⁹⁵ In 1251, King Alfonso X of Castile, also known as the Wise, commissioned *Las Siete Partidas*, a large legislative compilation which also contained doctrinal and philosophical comments.

In the 13th century, Norway witnessed a flowering of literature in the vernacular with the writing of royal sagas and political treatises. In the early decades of the century, courtly culture and literature reached the kingdom of Norway when the three Matters – the *Matter of Britain*, the *Matter of France*, and the *Matter of Rome*, were translated into Old Norse.¹⁹⁶ Together with these works, several poems were also translated, *chansons de gestes* and *fabliaux*, making a total of nearly 30 works. While only a portion can be linked to kings, source evidence clearly shows how Norwegian kings and queens emerged as patrons of literature.

King Håkon Håkonsson (1217–1263)

King Håkon Håkonsson appears to have been a major player in the import of courtly literature. The prologues of five translations of Old French Romances

(dir.) *Writings of the Reign of Henry II*. New-York: 25–52; P. Damian-Grint. 2006. « Benoît de Sainte-Maure et l'idéologie des Plantagenêts ». in M. Aurell and N.-Y. Tonnerre (dir.) *Plantagenêts et Capétiens. Confrontations et héritages*. Turnhout: 413–428.

- 192 Bezzola 2011, 3–312; Antonia Grandsen. 1975. "Propaganda in English medieval historiography." *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 1, no. 4: 363–381.
- 193 Monique Paulmier-Foucard. 2004. *Vincent de Beauvais et le Grand Miroir du monde*. Brepols: 105 ff.
- 194 F.C. Briggs. 1999. *Giles of Rome's De Regimine Principum*. Cambridge University Press: 9.
- 195 M. Sot et al. 1997. *Le Moyen Âge. Histoire Culturelle de la France 1*. Éditions du Seuil: 230.
- 196 The *Matter of France* is a body of literature which deals with the French kings and in particular Charlemagne and his companions, Roland, Ogier and Oliver. The *Matter of Britain* included texts related with Great Britain's legendary kings of whom King Arthur was the most popular character. Finally, there was also the *Matter of Rome*, which is a body of literature associated with Greek and Roman mythology and focused largely on the great military rulers of antiquity like Julius Caesar and Alexander the great. See Michel Zink, 2004. *Littérature française du Moyen Âge*, Paris: PUF; Derek Pearsall, 2005. *Arthurian Romance: a short introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford.

of chivalry known as *Riddarasögur* directly mention King Håkon Håkonsson as commissioner: *Elis saga*, *Tristams saga ok Ísöndar*, *Ívens saga*, *Strengleikar* and *Möttuls saga*. The prologue of *Tristams saga ok Ísöndar*, a translation of the Old French Tristan and Iseult, says that the work was made “at the behest and decree of honorable lord King Håkon.”¹⁹⁷ It has been argued that the text was commissioned for the king’s marriage with Earl Skule’s daughter.¹⁹⁸ The epilogue of the Norse translation of the Old French *Elie de Saint-Gille*, *Elis saga ok Rosamundu* cites King Håkon as commissioner of the work: “King Håkon, son of King Håkon had written this Norse book for entertainment.”¹⁹⁹ The prologue of *Strengleikar* says that “And this book, which noble King Håkon had turned into Norse from French, may be called a book of lays.”²⁰⁰ In the Old Norse translation of Chrétien de Troyes’s *Yvain, Le Chevalier au lion*, *Ívens saga*, is written that “And here ends the saga about lord Yvain which King Håkon the Old let translates from French to Norse.”²⁰¹ Finally, King Håkon also commissioned *Möttuls saga*, a translation of the French fabliau *Le mantel mautailé*.²⁰² It must be said though that there is an uncertainty concerning the historical validity of these dedications, as they appear in manuscripts written decades if not centuries after the original translations.²⁰³ The dating of these translations indicates that King Håkon’s sponsorship was a long-lasting enterprise. For instance, *Tristams saga* was written in 1226 whereas *Ívens saga* most probably was made between 1250 and 1257.²⁰⁴

Other texts such as *Parcevals saga*, a translation of Chrétien of Troyes’s *Perceval*, *Florés saga ok Blankiflúr*, *Partalopa saga*, *Flóvents saga Frakkakonungs*, and *Erex saga*, originally the French *Eric et Enide*, do not refer to any royal patronage, but are strongly associated with the court of Håkon Håkonsson.²⁰⁵

197 Marianne Kalinke. 1999c. *The Tristan legend*. Arthurian archives 3. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer: 28.

198 Halvorsen 1973, 19.

199 *Elis Saga ok Rosamundu*, 116.

200 M. Tveitane & Cook, R. 1979. *Strengleikar. An Old Norse translation of twenty-one Old French lays*. Kjeldeskriftfondet. Norrøne tekster; nr. 3, Oslo: 4.

201 Marianne Kalinke 1999a. *Hærra Ivan*. Arthurian archives 5. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer: 98.

202 Marianne Kalinke. 1999b. *The knights of the round table*. Arthurian archives 4. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer: 6.

203 Glauser 2005, 375.

204 Liliane Irlenbusch-Reynard. 2004. “Når en roman av Chrétien de Troyes blir til en norrøn saga. Fra Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion til Yvens saga.” *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 83, Universitetsforlaget: 248.

205 Kalinke 1981, 5–6.

King Håkon's involvement in the literary production at court can also be seen in the writing of the *Konungs Skuggsía*. The work was written between 1240 and 1260. It was a book of education for princes and was most probably destined for the king's heirs, Håkon the Young and Magnus. Such a pedagogical treatise for princes had contemporary models in France and England. It must be noticed that in England and France, the initiative was taken by the kings who wished to perfect their heirs with princely education. The *Konungs Skuggsía* borrows an important feature from these works. It is built on a dialogue between father and son, more precisely a colloquy structure common to contemporary guides of behavior for youth, like the contemporary Anglo-Norman *Urbain li Courtois* (second half of the 13th century) and *Enseignements de Robert de Ho* (end of 12th century).²⁰⁶ The prologue of the *Konungs Skuggsía* does not refer to any royal command, nor are references to any ambitions to provide princes with learning clear. On the one hand, the author emphasizes that the work has been given the title of *Speculum Regale* in order to provoke the interest of the reader and to encourage his eagerness to read it. He also points out that it is addressed to kings, because as holders of the highest title they ought to be examples for their subjects. However, the anonymous author concludes by stressing that "although the book is first and foremost a king's mirror, yet it is intended for everyone as common possession."²⁰⁷ The prologue thus does not give us a clear indication that it was a book intended for the education of the king's heirs. On the contrary, the author willingly expands the scope of his audience. In practice however, as we will see in great detail later, the work addressed the court and courtiers. Several chapters are dedicated to the instruction of men who wished to enter the court. As such the *Konungs Skuggsía* was a useful instrument in the hand of the king, who through the book could recruit and instruct courtiers in "proper" conduct. If the *Konungs Skuggsía* was not a royal commission, it was so intimately connected to the court and the king that it must have at least received royal approval.

A final example illustrates Håkon's patronage activity: *Fagrskinna*. The case is more than dubious, but there is a certain degree of plausibility. *Fagrskinna* recounts the history of the Norwegian kings from King Hálfðan the Black to King Magnus Erlingsson. The work is assimilated to the *Konungatal*, which is referred in the *Hákonar saga*:

206 Roberta L. Krueger. 2009. "Introduction: Teach your children well: Medieval conduct guides for youths." in Johnston Mark D. (Ed.) *Medieval Conduct Literature. An Anthology of Vernacular Guides to Behaviour for Youths, with English Translations*. University of Toronto Press Incorporated: xv.

207 *enn þó at þat sie helldur a ad kongs skugsion sie kallat þa er hun skiput ollum* (Kgs, Ch. 1).

In his illness he first had Latin books read to him. But then he found it was very tiring for him to think about how it should be translated. Then he had Norse books read to him night and day, first sagas of saints, and when they were finished, he had read to him the catalogue of kings, about Hálfðan svarti and then about all the kings of Norway, one after another...²⁰⁸

We know almost nothing about the circumstances surrounding the making of the text. Literary connections with Snorri's *Heimskringla* suggest a redaction close to the 1220s. We do not know who the author was, but Indrebø's literary analysis suggests that he was from the region of Nidaros and most probably of Icelandic origin. His study has also stressed a tone and orientation favoring the Sverrir dynasty. Based on these elements, Indrebø has seen in the author, a loyal subject to King Håkon Håkonsson and in *Fagrskinna* a history in the service of his rule and even a result of his commissioning.²⁰⁹

Magnus the Lawmender (1263–1280)

Håkon the young apparently inherited his father's taste for culture as he is himself believed to be the author of *Barlaams ok Jósaphat saga* (c. 1250), a translation of the legend of Saint Josaphat from a Latin version or from the French by Gui de Cambrai, *Barlaam et Josaphat* (c. 1220–25).²¹⁰ His early death however left his younger brother, Magnus, to become a great ruler and also a grand patron of art. Following his predecessor's example, King Magnus kept sponsoring the production of courtly literature. According to the epilogue of the *Gyðinga saga*, the king commissioned the Icelandic bishop Brand Jónsson to write two works: the translation of a *History of the Jews* from a Latin text and the *Alexanders saga*, a translation of a 12th century Latin poem on Alexander the Great by Gautier of Châtillon, *Alexandreis*.²¹¹ However Magnus's activity as patron was the most striking in his commissioning of Sturla Þórðarson to write two royal sagas: *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* and *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss*.

Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar tells the life of King Håkon the Old (1204–1263), father of King Magnus the Lawmender. According to the *Sturlunga saga*, when

208 Í sóttinni lét hann first lesa sér Látínubækr. En þá þótti hönnum sér mikil mæða í, at hugsa þar eptir hversu þat þýddi. Lét hann þá lesa fyrir sér Norænu-bækr, nætr ok daga; first Heilagra-mannasögur; ok er þær þraut, lét hann lesa sér Konungatal frá Hálfðani Svarta, ok síðan frá öllum Noregskonungum, hverjum eptir annan... (HsH, Ch. 331).

209 *Fagrskinna*, G. Indrebø. Kristiana: grøndahl & Søn's Boktrykkeri 1917: 277.

210 Leach 1921, 154; "Barlaams ok Josaphats saga," by Mageröy. H., KLNLM vol I, 342–343.

211 Berulfsen: «Gyðinga saga» vol. v, 604–605. «Alexandersagaen», by Ludvig Holm-Olsen, KLNLM: vol. I, 75–76.

King Magnus heard of the death of Håkon in the Orkneys in the winter of 1263 he commissioned Sturla Þórðarson to write the saga of his father.²¹² Like his ancestor, King Sverre, Magnus found the author of his royal biographies in Iceland. Yet, unlike Karl Jónsson, Sturla was neither monk nor priest. He was a chieftain who belonged to the powerful family of the Sturlungs.²¹³ It is assumed that the text was probably already finished in 1265.²¹⁴

Beyond the entertaining function of the saga, its writing had an obvious political interest for Magnus. In particular, the saga was a crucial medium in the legitimizing of the dynasty. King Håkon's rights to the throne are central in the narrative of the first third of the text. The detailed account of the meetings where his legitimacy was debated, and in particular the successful arguments used to justify Håkon's claims, retrospectively consolidated the dynasty's legitimacy and thus that of his heirs.²¹⁵

Magnus' undertaking was remarkable and unique in the composition of official histories. The command is the first clear evidence of a royal initiative to provide the royal dynasty with a complete and uninterrupted collection of royal histories. The pioneering work of King Sverre with *Grýla* in the late 12th century had laid the foundations. His text was finished later as the *Sverris saga*, which ended with the king's death in 1202. Of course, other histories were written that started where the *Sverris saga* left off: the two texts of the *Böglunga Sögur*, which were probably written around 1220. Their origin is unknown however, and in entrusting Sturla with the task of writing *Hákonar saga*, King Magnus went back to the history of his forefathers and continued the narrative of Norwegian kings.

King Magnus not only commissioned the saga, but if we are to believe the *Sturlunga saga*, he actively participated in the making of the history: "he compiled the *Hákonar saga Hákonssonar* following what he himself laid down and the accounts of wisest men."²¹⁶ However, the level of the king's involvement is difficult to assess. Although Hermann Palsson assumes that King Magnus was truly involved in the redaction of the work, he also suggests that "Sturla has assumed full responsibility for the selection and presentation of facts" and that "we must regard the saga as his own personal interpretation of King Håkon's life times."²¹⁷

212 Sts, II: 327.

213 Kristjánsson 2007, 193–194.

214 «Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar», by Knut Helle, KLN M Vol VI.: 51–53.

215 HsH, Chs. 1–100.

216 *setja saman sögu Hákonar konungs föður síns eptir sjálfs hans raði ok inna vitrustu manna forsoðn* (Sts, II: 327).

217 Hermann Palsson. 1973. "Hákonar saga – portrait of a king." *Orkney Miscellany – King Håkon Commemorative Number* Vol. 5: 55.

The king was connected to the redaction of the saga at different levels. First, the simple fact that the saga was a royal command implicitly “obliged” Sturla to glorify Håkon’s achievements and to provide him with a laudatory portrait. As a part of this enterprise of exaltation, Sturla thus inserted into the saga one of the eulogistic poems which had so impressed King Magnus at Sturla’s arrival in Norway.²¹⁸ Similarly, the tales of his conquest abroad (Iceland 1262, and to a lesser extent the Hebrides) and his military actions against Denmark and Sweden contributed to the portrait of a sovereign successful in his foreign policies who established lasting peace in his kingdom.²¹⁹ Second, Sturla could rely on Magnus as a source. King Magnus was born in May 1238 and thereby constituted a reliable eye-witness of his father’s doings and life at court from the late 1240s onwards.

Royal commitment is also evident through the fact that the king provided all the sources Sturla needed to succeed in his enterprise. It has become clear that in addition to witnesses, the author was able to draw on a considerable number of written sources. According to Narve Bjørgo, 99 letters were directly mentioned in the saga or were used indirectly in the writing of the narrative. He suggests also that other types of documents, of great variety, probably had been actively used by Sturla for reconstruction of political meetings, rituals (Ordines), itineraries (“written itineraries”).²²⁰ Based on obituaries and lists of different sorts (crew-lists) Sturla also was able to list the attendants at meetings and ceremonies and the participants in military campaigns.²²¹ This documentation was found in the royal chancery, although its existence at the time of King Håkon Håkonsson and King Magnus the Lawmender is far from ascertained. As Bjørgo argues, the documents which Sturla used in the saga were probably dispatched from different archives in Bergen and Nidaros, some belonging to the kings and other to the archbishops.²²² The king probably used all his influence and authority to make sure that the author had access to these archives.

Sturla consolidated his position as official biographer in writing the *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss*, the saga of Magnus the Lawmender. The project was a commission and also the logic continuation of providing the dynasty with an

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

²¹⁹ Bagge 1996, 91–160.

²²⁰ According to Bjørgo, the precision and often ancientness of the description of itineraries by Sturla could not only be drawn from oral testimonies from eye-witnesses, but merely from existing «skrivne itinerarer», written itineraries. Bjørgo 1967, 209.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 185–229.

²²² *Ibid.*

uninterrupted history. In ordering the writing of his history, King Magnus sought not only to leave a favorable image of his reign, but also to inscribe his reign into a historical continuity.

The text has only survived in two short fragments, which account for the years 1264–1265 and 1271–1274, and which do not allow us to determine with certainty the circumstances of its redaction. The biography was started during the king's life, probably once the saga of his father had been completed. It was probably finished before 1284 when the author died. Given the quasi-absence of text, we have to assume that the saga was started after the death of King Håkon and finished with the death of King Magnus in 1280.²²³ In contrast to the first saga, Sturla was the direct witness of many the events which he reported. He stayed in Norway at different times: from 1263 to 1271 and probably in 1278.²²⁴ According to the *Sturlunga saga*, King Magnus actively participated in the making of the story: "And then, under his second stay abroad, he was again by king Magnus. He was well received and appreciated. He then compiled the saga of King Magnus, after letters and the king's own direction."²²⁵ The brevity of the extant fragments prevents us from gauging the degree to which the monarch was involved in the redaction of his saga. The fact that parts of the text were written during the Magnus's lifetime support the idea that for some episodes, the king directly supervised Sturla in his work. *Sturlunga saga* again mentions the use of letters, which we must assume were been obtained under very similar circumstances to that of *Hákonar saga*.

Queen Euphemia (1299–1312)

Finally, our last instance of royal literary patronage takes us to the early 14th century, to the court of King Håkon Magnusson in Oslo. The sons of King Magnus the Lawmender themselves were paragons of the learned kings. They most probably received a written education in Latin. The sole evidence for this lies in *Laurentius saga Biskup*, which recounts Duke Håkon holding a public speech in Latin.²²⁶ Thanks to the *Chronicle of Lanercost* we know much more about King Eirik, who was taught "The French and English languages" through

223 «Magnus lagabøters saga» by Finn Hødnebo, KLNLM Vol. XI, 237–238.

224 Ólafía Einarisdóttir. 1967. "Hvornår forfattedes Sagaen om Magnus Lagabøter." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 46: 59–67.

225 *Ok þá í annarri utanferð Sturlu var hann enn með Magnúsi konungi vel haldinn ok mikils metinn. Þá setti hann saman sögu Magnúss konungs eptir bréfum ok sjálfs hans raði* (Sts, II: 327).

226 *stod Hakon kongr vpp. og talade bæði med latinv og norrænv*, "King Hákon stood up and spoke in Latin and in Norse" (*Lsb*, Ch. 16).

his wife, the Scottish princess Margaret.²²⁷ The decisive influence of the queen in the education of the king was maybe an indication of what was to follow.

The turn of the 13th century saw the renewal of princely literary patronage at the court of the Norwegian kings. But this was not due to the kings, but to a woman, Queen Euphemia. Euphemia was a Danish princess from the principality of Rügen on the Baltic Sea who married King Håkon in 1299. She came from a rich cultural milieu with, for instance, a brother who was a famous poet.²²⁸ Her literary sponsorship bears witness to her personal interest in literature and probably to her level of culture. Through her kin she was connected to the most active cultural spheres in Europe, like the courts of Aquitaine and England. Queen Euphemia was part of the tradition of female patrons of literature, like Marie of Champagne, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Margaret of Provence.²²⁹ Under her command, three romances in rhyme, known as *Eufemiavisor*, were translated from French and German into Old Swedish: *Herr Ivan* (1303), *Hertig Fredrik af Normandie* (1308) and *Flores och Blanzefflor* (1312).²³⁰ The epilogue of *Herr Ivan* attests the patronage of Queen Euphemia: "Queen Euphemia, you may believe me, had this book translated from the French tongue into our language."²³¹ The second work translated, *Hertig Fredrik af Normandie*, confirms the role of Euphemia as patron: "Recently it was set again into rhyme, a second time, from German into the Swedish tongue – a language that both old and young understand. Queen Euphemia had it translated into that language."²³² Finally *Flores och Blanzefflor* also mentions the queen's direct involvement as sponsor: "This book was translated into rhyme by Euphemia the queen, just before she died."²³³

Although her literary achievement has been interpreted as a deliberate attempt to make the Norwegian court one of the most brilliant cultural centers

227 *Idioma Gallicum et Anglicum* (CL, 105).

228 M. Pontoppidan. 2012. "Wizlaw III og Minnesangen." In Bjørn Bandlien (red.) *Eufemia – Oslos Middelalderdronning*. Oslo: Dreyers Forlag: 173–182.

229 Nancy Goldstone. 2009. *Four Queens: The Provençal Sisters Who Ruled Europe*. Phoenix Paperbacks, London.

230 Layher 2010, 91–130; «Eufemiavisorna», by Carl Ivar Sthåle, KLNLM Vol. IV, 55–57.

231 *Eufemia drötning, þæt maghin i tro/ læt þæssa bokena vænda svo/ af valske tungo ok a vart mal.* (HI).

232 *Nw ær hon annan tiidh giordh til rima/ nylike jnnan stuntan tima/ aff thyzko och j swænskæ thungo/ thet forstanda gamble och unge. / Hona loth wænde a thetta mall/ Eufemice drötning.* (Flores, 2100).

233 *Thesse bok loot vænda til rima/ Eufemia drötning ij then tima/ lithth för æn hon do.* (Hertig Fredrik).

in the North, Queen Euphemia did come to an environment that was already rich in culture. The Scottish Queen Isabella, widow of King Eirik, was also interested in literature, as witnessed by her possession of a manuscript in Old French, *Historia Rerum in Partibus Transmarinis Gestarum*.²³⁴ As we will also discuss greater detail later (see III, 6), the court of King Håkon also housed barons who appear to have been clearly interested in literature through sponsorship or book production: Snara Aslaksson, Bjarne Audusson and Hauk Erlendsson.²³⁵ The example of Queen Euphemia, and to a lesser extent of Queen Isabella, highlights the role of queens and princesses as transnational cultural mediators.²³⁶

Kings as Builders

The Norwegian kings were not only supporters of literature. They were also patrons of art and architecture. The ideal of the king builder was another aspect of King Solomon. King Solomon was responsible for building the Temple in Jerusalem and through him, in the 13th century building became an attribute of the modern ruler. Everywhere in Western Europe, monarchs used their wealth and authority to build large castles, palaces and churches. King Håkon complied with this ideal, and the last chapters of *Håkonar saga* integrate Håkon's achievement as builder in their eulogy. King Håkon was responsible for the construction of several churches, castles and halls in Norway's greatest cities as well as throughout the country.²³⁷ He was a particularly active builder in Bergen. After the fire of 1248, which destroyed large parts of the eastern side of the town, he financed the construction in stone of the Church of the Apostles in the royal residence, and the Katarina Church. In addition he paid for the extension to a Franciscan monastery and to the Church of St-Olav.²³⁸ The main building site remained the royal palace of Holmen. The palace dated from the time of Olav Kyrre (1066–93) and Eysteinn Magnusson (1088–1123).²³⁹ Håkon expanded it greatly, building several massive constructions in stone. He had a stone wall built around the palace. The main element of this architectural activity was the great Hall of Håkon, which was erected sometime between 1247 and 1261. It was an imposing building in stone with several storeys. The erection

234 See Randi B. Wærdahl. (2012). "Dronning Isabella Bruce." In Bjørn Bandlien (red.) *Eufemia – Oslos Middelalderdronning*. Oslo: Dreyers Forlag 106–107.

235 Eriksen 2007, 158–160.

236 See Henriette Mikkelsen Hoel. 2012. "Fyrstedatteren fra Rügen som ble Norsk Dronning." In Bjørn Bandlien (red.) *Eufemia – Oslos Middelalderdronning*. Oslo: Dreyers Forlag: 35–49.

237 *HsH*, Ch. 333.

238 Helle 1982, 579–581.

239 *Ibid.*, 153–155.

of the castle did serve military purposes, but it was used to house the king's administration and organize official receptions, like the marriage of King Magnus with the Danish princess Ingeborg in 1261. His son, Magnus the Lawmender, was also involved in the reconstruction of Bergen after the fire of 1270, when he had the Church of Olav rebuilt. He also added a castell to the royal residence, known as "the castell by the sea."²⁴⁰

In sponsoring the construction of churches, the kings only followed the lead of bishops and abbots whom they were attempting to replace, no more and no less.²⁴¹ The construction of churches and convents in towns emphasized the kings' piety and exalted their authority. In particular, the construction or extension of royal palaces in towns, like the royal residence of Holmen in Bergen, aimed to establish architecturally the power and authority of the king over the town. The massive constructions in stone equated and sometimes outclassed earlier ecclesiastic monuments and made the king's palace a central element of the urban landscape.

Miles Literati

The need for knowledge and literacy did not limit itself to rulers. In Europe, the ideal of the learned king was paralleled with the ideal of *miles litteratus*, the literate knight. The ideal of the learned knight who devoted his time to the pursuit of knowledge through reading was widespread at the Plantagenet and Capetian courts.²⁴² It opposed that of the professional warrior living a life of violence, whose education was limited to military skills and values such as courage, loyalty and discipline.

In reality, the exigency for aristocratic knowledge in Norway seems to have been very limited. It is true that the *Hirðskrá* considers *nam kiennir*, "the search for learning" a duty for men of the *hirð* and compels them to appropriate knowledge.²⁴³ In a similar fashion, the *Konungs Skuggsía* regards,

All forms of learning, insight, and good foresight [...] to stewardship, government and the enforcement of law [...] are akin to wisdom. And you will need to learn all this thoroughly.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 549.

²⁴¹ Iogna-Prat 2006, 331–332.

²⁴² Martin Aurell. 2006. *Le chevalier lettré. Savoir et conduit de l'aristocratie aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*. Fayard; About the Plantagenet court, see Aurell 2007b, 68–163. For France see Scaglione 1991, 68–88; and Bumke 2000, 426–429.

²⁴³ *Hsk*, Ch. 24.

²⁴⁴ *Hof allt oc sannsyni e roc mikít manvit. froðleicr allr oc skilning oll oc goð forsio [...] eða siða landz byggingar eða lagha gezlo eða lannz gezlo [...] er þessa luti kunnu.* (*Kgs*, Ch. xli).

However, these admonitions were very general and very sporadic in the work, at least compared with foreign works such as the Castilian *Las Siete Partidas* which dedicates three full chapters to the knights' culture and need for intelligence.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, the ideal of the *miles litteratus* is totally absent in the *Konungs Skuggsía*. Some striking absences in the work illustrate the distance between the real degree of education of the aristocracy and the standards defined in European literature. Nowhere can we find encouragement or admonitions to courtiers to indulge in reading or other cultural activities. This is particularly blatant in the chapters dedicated to their activities at court. In the list of amusements and leisure pursuits, the author enumerates only activities that primarily sought to improve the military skills of the king's men. He advises courtiers to regularly train in different techniques and weapons. For instance, if horses are available, the courtier shall practice fighting with armor on horseback. Combat training with armor on foot is also strongly encouraged as a pastime. The perfect courtier shall also practice with swords, bows and various types of spears and missiles when the opportunity arises. In addition to these physical techniques, the *Konungs Skuggsía* also transmits military values such as courage and bravery.²⁴⁶ In order to complete the courtier's military education, these considerations are followed by a lengthy account of tactics and techniques of combat on land and on sea, as well as a description of siege works and siege tactics.²⁴⁷ We see that the *Konungs Skuggsía* still largely promotes courtiers' physical and military qualities far above intellectual skills.

In practice we know next to nothing about the educational and cultural level of the aristocracy in the 13th century and the little we know is based on the few widely dispersed indications in our textual sources.²⁴⁸ Thus we have very little evidence of magnates frequenting schools. We do know that King Håkon the Old was not alone in the Cathedral school and that one of his school companions was Guttorm Ingesson, son of King Inge II (1204–17) and future archbishop of Nidaros.²⁴⁹ The paucity of sources referring to aristocratic education leads us to make merely conjectural propositions.

As the network of schools was very limited in Norway, magnates could also be instructed by private tutors. To receive a high education, they could also follow the clerical elite and study abroad in the schools and universities of

245 *Lsp*, II, Title XXI, Laws IV, V and VI.

246 *Kgs*, Ch. xxxvii.

247 *Kgs*, Chs. xxxviii and xxxix.

248 Melve 2001, 127–146; Nedkvitne 2004, 36–155; Kjell Ivar Vannebo. 1994. "Hva vet vi om lese- og skriveferdigheten i Norge i middelalderen?" *Maal og Minne*, Nr. 1–2: 5–23.

249 *HsH*, Ch. 8.

Europe. The level of education that magnates could receive in Norwegian schools or from private teachers was certainly enough to read and provide them with basic writing skills. In his *Heimskringla*, Snorri recurrently shows magnates frequently exchanging letters to communicate with each other, but we do not know if they wrote and read those letters themselves. In continental Europe, the lay aristocracy received much of its education at princely courts.²⁵⁰ Yet there too, our sources provide little evidence of educational activities at the court of the Norwegian kings. The sole episode witnessing the use of written word at court is in the *Hirðskrá*, which tells the men of the *hirð* to hear the law read out loud at Christmas. The reading of the law took place daily and was to last the whole week of celebrations.²⁵¹

Literary and Art Patronage: A Royal Monopoly?

While the kings played a leading role in the diffusion of courtly romances and commissioned royal biographies, histories, and possibly political treatises like the *Konungs Skuggsía*, it would be wrong to see a royal monopoly in these examples of literary patronage. It is a fact that seven courtly romances were royal commissions, but around twenty texts potentially had no royal involvement. However, although aristocratic patronage was a usual practice in Western Europe, we do have only little evidence of Norwegian nobles as patrons of literature and art.²⁵² *Böglunga sögur* illustrates an early aristocratic involvement in literary production. *Böglunga sögur* tells the story of the Birkebeiner and Bagler kings from 1202 to 1217. The saga exists in two versions; a short one, which was probably finished around 1210, and a longer version from c. 1220.²⁵³ Although the texts are anonymous and lack dedicatees, on the basis of political affinities and the chronology scholars have suggested that the first version may have been written in the circle of the Bagler chieftain Arnbjørn Jónsson.²⁵⁴ Duke Skule Bårdsson (1189–1240) is believed to have been directly involved as patron in the writing of the second and longer version (c. 1220).²⁵⁵ It could be added that Skule apparently had extensive contact with foreign courts and in particular with that of the English kings, which could have favored cultural exchange and the rise of literary activity at his court.²⁵⁶

250 Bumke 2000, 426–436.

251 *huerium jolom skal alla hirðskra upp lesa ollum handgengnom monnum* (*Hsk*, Ch. 52).

252 Bumke 2000, 471–488.

253 «Böglunga sogur», by Hallvard Magerøy, KLNLM Vol. II: 35.

254 Helle 1958, 106.

255 The theory of Skuli's patronage is suggested in Knut Helle 1958, 91–111 and Magerøy 1988, 206–207.

256 *RN* 407, 409, 437, 456, 470, 471, 472, 474, 484, 547, 587, 615, 623, 634, 636, 646, 704.

The absence of a prologue or of explicit references to princely sponsorship in many courtly works is a serious barrier to our analysis of aristocratic involvement in the spreading of courtly literature. The sole known example is quite late: Bjarni Erlingsson, lendman and advisor of King Eirik Magnusson (1280–99). According to the prologue of the *Af frú Ólif og Landrés syni*, a Norse translation of an OFr *chanson de geste*, Bjarni heard the story of Olive and Landri during a sojourn in Scotland in the winter of 1286–87 and ordered its translation into ON.²⁵⁷

Aristocratic interest and potential involvement in courtly literature can also be reflected in the possession of books and private libraries by the nobility. Again, information on private libraries in the Norwegian aristocracy is scarce and often from a late date. Snara Aslaksson, baron and advisor to King Håkon Magnusson in the early 14th century, is believed to have owned a manuscript of the *Elis saga* and of *Ólafs saga*.²⁵⁸ Snara's contemporary, Bjarne Audunsson, also advisor to the king, is known from his last will to have possessed several books about Roman and Canonic Law, as well as political treatises such as Aegidius Colonna's *De regimine principum*.²⁵⁹ Finally, the Icelander Hauk Erlendsson, another officer of the king, collected the work known as *Hauksbók*, a compilation of many Old Icelandic texts, like the *Breta sögur*, a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, and more remarkably, a translation from Latin of some sections of ancient books on mathematics, *Carmen de Algorismo* by the French Alexander of Villedieu (c. 1200), *Liber Abaci* by the Italian Fibonacci (1202), and *Algorismus Vulgaris* by Johannes De Sacrobosco (1230).²⁶⁰ Within the wider Norwegian cultural sphere, Iceland offers a remarkable example of aristocratic sponsorship. We know of Icelandic chieftains such as Snorri Sturluson (*Heimskringla*) and Sturla þórðarson (*Íslendinga saga*) who were personally involved in the redaction of texts. But for the Icelandic aristocracy, patronage also seems to have been a means of affirming their identity. A branch of Icelandic sagas, the Family sagas – though we mostly lack of explicit authorship and sponsorship – were so intimately connected with local Icelandic chieftaincies that they are believed to have been produced by the chieftains themselves.²⁶¹

257 Ks, p. 50.

258 Stefka G. Eriksen. 2010. *Writing and Reading in Medieval Manuscript Culture. The transmission of the story of Elye in Old French and Old Norse literary contexts*. University of Oslo: 190.

259 «Kongespeillitteratur», by Anne Holtmark, KLNLM Vol. 9, 66; Helle 1972, 599–600.

260 «Hauksbók», by Jakob Benediktsson, KLNLM Vol. VI.; 250–251.

261 Kristinsson 2003, 9–17.

Other examples of aristocratic commitment to literary production are to be found in the 13th century clerical elite. Bjarni Kolbeinsson, bishop of the Orkneys (1188–1223), was the author of a poem *Jómsvíkingadrápa* and had probably some connections with the redaction of the *Orkneyinga saga*, whether as author or commissioner.²⁶² Finally, Bishop Arne Sigurdsson of Bergen (1305–1314) owned a compilation of German stories, *Didrik Saga* (c. 1250), which were translated into Old Norse.²⁶³

Besides royal and aristocratic patronage, the translation into Norse of many of these *chansons de gestes* and romances could also have been the result of the private initiative of poets and authors who frequented the royal court. They wrote and performed these texts to attract favor from the king or to please his circle. The most striking example is Sturla Þórðarson, who was engaged by King Magnus as an official historiographer shortly after he recited laudatory poems in honor of Magnus and in honor of King Hákon Hákonsson.²⁶⁴

Finally, as we mentioned the building activity of the Norwegian kings, it should also be made clear that at the very end of the 13th century nobles also emerged as major builders. Audun Hugleiksson (1240–1302), Magnus the Lawmender and Eirik Magnusson's right hand and treasurer, built a massive stone castle at Hegrenes modelled on Hákon's hall in Bergen. According to Munthe, the castle was a manifestation of his desire to appear as a lord in the European fashion.²⁶⁵ Finally, Alv Erlingsson (1290), Earl of Sarpsborg, probably was responsible for the construction of a castle in stone and wood at Kråkerøy on the river Glomma at the end of the 13th century. The castle no longer exists and may have been destroyed following Alv's rebellion against Duke Hákon in 1287.²⁶⁶

The Structures of Production of Court Literature

The education, culture and growing interest in the written word of 13th century Norwegian monarchs favored their personal and direct involvement in literary activity. However, in the great majority of cases they had to rely on the expertise and knowledge of intellectuals of different origins and milieus.

262 Jón Stefánsson. 1907. "Bjarni Kolbeinsson, the Skald, Bishop of Orkney, 1188–1223." *Orkney and Shetland Miscellany* 1: 43–47.

263 «Didrik Saga», by Ernst Nygren, *KLNM Vol III*: 69–71.

264 Kristjánsson 2007, 194.

265 Munthe 1932–33, 174–179.

266 *NBL*, Vol. 1 1923: 112–114; Helle 1964, 188.

Intellectuals at Court

The courts of Western European monarchs housed intellectuals who created propaganda for the king. The Castilian King Alfonso X's literary, philosophical and scientific achievements relied on the patronage of court physicians, lawyers, poets and translators, most often Jews or Arabs.²⁶⁷ The French king Philip II Augustus daily was able to meet at his court William le Breton, chaplain to the king and author of the panegyric poem the *Philippide* and the *Gesta Philippi H. regis Francorum*. Jean de Joinville, author of the biography of Louis IX, *Livre des saintes paroles et des bons faiz de nostre saint roy Looy's*, had been the king's personal advisor.²⁶⁸ However, much of Capetian official historiography did not come from the court. As we have earlier seen (see I, 4), the monastery of St-Denis proclaimed itself the official center of the dynasty's historiography. Thus, at the beginning of the 13th century, a monk of St-Denis called himself *regis Francorum cronographus*, "chronograph of the king of France."²⁶⁹ Plantagenet kings and queens could rely on their court clerks and literate knights such as Wace, Roger of Hoveden, Robert of Cricklade, Walter Map, or Ralph of Coggeshall to exalt the dynasty through their histories and poems.²⁷⁰ However, like their Capetian counterparts, the Plantagenets relied on ecclesiastical institutions in the making of their ideology. Westminster Abbey and several other monasteries put their scriptoriums and antechambers at the service of royal ideology and propaganda.²⁷¹

There were decisive advantages linked to a permanent or semi-permanent stay of artists and writers at the court of their patron. In their courts, princely patrons provided for their employees' basic material needs: food, shelter and even clothes.²⁷² More particularly, the patron could furnish his artist with his work instruments: parchments, feathers, reed pens and ink.²⁷³ Last but not least, patrons placed their artists under their personal protection.

267 Robert I. Burns. 1990. "Stupor Mundi: Alfonso X of Castile, the Learned." in Robert I. Burns (ed.) *Emperor of Culture*. University of Pennsylvania Press: 1–13; Norman Roth. 1990. "Jewish Collaborators in Alfonso's Scientific Work." in Robert I. Burns (ed.) *Emperor of Culture*. University of Pennsylvania Press: 59–71.

268 Le Goff 2009, 376–381.

269 *Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume*, 1.

270 Aurell 2007b, 83–109; Bezzola 2011, Vol III, 3–31.

271 Binski 1995.

272 Wranke 1993, 124–132.

273 Sophie Cassagnes-Bouquet. 2003. *La passion du livre au Moyen-Age*. Editions Ouest-France: 13–15.

The question now is whether the court of the Norwegian kings of the 13th century also housed ideologues dedicated to the exaltation of their patrons. Again the source material is scarce and only allows us general if not tentative conclusions. However, a couple of examples shed a light on the presence of writers at the royal court of King Håkon Håkonsson and King Magnus the Lawmender.

The first example is the author of the *Konungs Skuggsía*. We do not know his identity, but many elements suggest that he belonged to the court of King Håkon Håkonsson. First among these is the content of the work. The *Konungs Skuggsía* was a work about the court and for the court. The text is divided in three sections (the merchants, the *hirð*, and the king), of which two (*hirð* and king) clearly address the royal court.²⁷⁴ In the section about the *hirð*, the author elaborates at length on court life, how to become a member of the *hirð* and what the duties and proper conduct of the men of the *hirð* are at court. These considerations seem to be clearly based on extensive personal experience.²⁷⁵ The author's familiarity with the daily activities of the court show that he knew the royal court very well and must have been one of its members over a long period of time. The identity of the author has been subject to many speculations in the scholarship. A series of names have been proposed, all of them based on the premise that he was intimately connected to the royal circle. The first of them is Ivar Bodde, who officiated as *hirð*-priest and "chancellor" at the court of King Sverre and Inge Bårdsson.²⁷⁶ Master William, one of the chaplains at the court of King Håkon Håkonsson, has also been proposed.²⁷⁷ He was contemporary to the redaction of the text, but evidence of his implication in the *Konungs Skuggsía* is scarce. F. Paasche strongly argued that archbishop Einar Gunnarson was the author.²⁷⁸ However, as Bagge suggested, the extent of his

274 The section on merchants however also was relevant for the court. In this part, the author addresses Norwegian merchants and gives them advice on how to behave and how to succeed in their business. Nonetheless, the type of merchants that he is thinking about belonged to the aristocratic elite. They are independent and capital strong. Basically, any member of the lay elite indulged in trade and precisely based its economic capital on this activity.

275 Bagge 1987b, 218 ff.

276 A. Heffermehl. 1904. "Presten Ivar Bodde." in *Historiske Skrifter tilegnede Ludvig Daae*. Kristiana: 79–104.

277 Ludvig Daae. 1896. "Studier angaaende Kongespeilet." *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed*: 171–196.

278 Frederick Paasche. 1927. "Om Kongespeilets forfatter." in *Festskrift til Hj. Falk*. Oslo: 170–181.

279 Bagge 1987b, 218–224.

learning in classical authors shows that if he was a learned man, he was far from being erudite.²⁷⁹

The probable author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* was not the only intellectual permanently based at court. Although Queen Euphemia is ascribed a decisive role in the translation of Old French courtly poems, the local court culture and contacts with foreign courts also must have been decisive. Scholars assume that the anonymous author of the translations commissioned by Queen Euphemia corresponds to the profile of the Swedish Peter Algotsson.²⁸⁰ We know little of Peter's life, but it is believed that he had studied in Paris before making a career in Sweden as canon at Skara Cathedral in 1278. In the 1280s, we find him at the court of the Norwegian king working as envoy for diplomatic missions for the kings of Norway. His contacts with foreign courts, in particular in the British Isles, combined with his position as an intimate of the royal court, made Peter the epitome of the courtier working for the transfer of culture to Norway.²⁸¹ Peter's own culture and his knowledge of foreign courts, their trends and fashions must have been decisive in the selection and execution of the translations.

Besides these examples, we find also instances of the shorter-term presence of intellectuals at the royal court. According to the prologue of the *Sverris saga*, the Icelandic abbot Karl Jónsson attended the king in Norway only for the writing of *Grýla* (see 11, 3). Sturla Þordarson provides another example of an artist living at the court of its royal patron to accomplish the task which he was entrusted with. Sturla was commissioned by King Magnus to write *Hákonar saga* in 1263. As shown above, the text was written between 1264 and 1265. We believe that Sturla was in Norway until the king sent him back to Iceland in 1271 to bring the new law book *Járnsiða*. We do not know when or where he wrote *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* as the manuscript has come to us incomplete. However, Sturla's use of documents from the chancery and of testimonies strongly suggests his physical presence at the royal court. Finally, the sagas attest the presence of reputed translators of romances in Norway. For instance, we do know that Bishop Brand was in Norway during the winter 1262–63 and that maybe he wrote his translation of *Alexandreis* during this stay.²⁸²

280 Bjarne Beckman. 1947. "Om tiden och sättet för Hertig Fredriks försvenkning." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 62: 263–267; Carl Ivar Sthåle. 1949. "Til frågan om tillkomsten av 'Hertig Fredrik'." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 64: 237–245; William Layher. 2011. "The Old Swedish Hærra Ivan Leons riddare." In Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.) *The Arthur of the North. The Arthurian legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press: 98–122.

281 Layher 2010, 94.

282 «Alexandersagaen», by L. Holm-Olsen, KLN Vol. 1: 76.

Outside the context of patronage, it is difficult to assess the court's power of attraction for intellectuals. Obviously the Norwegian kings succeeded in exploiting foreign visitors to recruit skilled intellectuals to their court. For instance, Laurence, Bishop of Hólar, came into King Eirik's service when he was staying in Bergen (1294). The king happened to witness his skills in Latin and offered him to come into his service.²⁸³ At times the visits of illustrious artists and intellectuals could have significant consequences for the court artistic activity. At first, the presence of the renowned English historian and artist Matthew Paris at the court of King Håkon Håkonsson in 1248 was not inspired by any cultural considerations. His visit was motivated by the fact that Matthew bore letters from the French king, Louis IX, who offered Håkon the chance to co-lead a crusade to the Holy Land.²⁸⁴ However, it has been assumed that the author of *Chronica Majora's* stay may have had major literary consequences for a court and a king who showed great interest in history. Helle has suggested that there are possible connections between Paris's work and the *Hákonar saga*, such as the similar use of letters and documents in the narrative in the *Chronica* and in Sturla's text.²⁸⁵ Helle is cautious about the nature of this relation, but implies that Matthew may have had "a hand in the introduction of contemporary European chronicle writing to the court milieu that later produced the *Hákonar saga*."²⁸⁶ Other theories have ascribed Matthew Paris significant artistic influence outside the court. Thus it has been maintained that he was involved in the design of the west front of the cathedral of Nidaros and in the painting of panels at the Church of Fåberg in Eastern Norway.²⁸⁷ These theories are largely conjectural, and witness of the limitation of our knowledge on court literary and artistic production. However, the visit of Matthew Paris illustrates Norwegian kings' difficulty in attracting scholars. Would have he come to the Norwegian court if it was not for his diplomatic mission? Norwegian kings probably paid the price of lying in the periphery of cultural currents and despite their determination to attract scholars and intellectuals, apparently very few sought out the Norwegian court for its cultural and artistic brilliance.

However, evidence shows that in order to attract skilled artists to their court, Norwegian kings were compelled to do the same as any other prince in Western

283 *Lsb*, Ch. 10.

284 Richard Vaughan. (1958) 2008. *Matthew Paris*. Cambridge University Press: 4–7.

285 Helle 1968, 110–111.

286 "It is a tempting guess, but for the time being not much more, that Matthew Paris did have a hand in the introduction of contemporary European chronicle writing to the court milieu that later produced the *Hákonar saga*" *Ibid.*, 111.

287 Vaughan 2008, 205–207, 228–229; Harry Fett. 1910. "Mattheus af Paris og hans stilling i norsk kunsthistorie." *Foreningen til Norske Fortidsminnesmerkers Bevaring*: 205–210.

Europe: reward the artist.²⁸⁸ Remuneration and rewards were designed to guarantee the artist's welfare and provide him with the necessary conditions to carry out his activity. Yet we have very few evidence of remuneration for artistic service at the Norwegian court. Although we do not have proof of the existence of a system of contractual commissioning and fixed salaries for court artists, authors like Sturla, who was engaged in the long-term project of saga writing, probably received an appointment with a fixed annual salary. The evidence of the Icelandic poet Guðmundr is maybe an excessive illustration of generous sponsorship, but it shows that the court had established a system of rewards to sponsor the creation of court literature. The poet was given the governorship of a whole district on Iceland by King Eirik Magnusson as reward for a single skaldic poem.²⁸⁹ The case of Laurence shows that the king provided his learned staff with commodities, but that he could also share the costs with other wealthy partners. Thus the *Laurentius saga Biskups* recounts that Bishop Laurence was invited to stay by the king's side as long as he wished and that he spent the winter "in the hall with the king, but sometimes at Lord Peter's charges [bishop of Bergen]." ²⁹⁰

The court of the Norwegian kings may not have been a flourishing milieu of culture to the same extent as the most prestigious courts of Europe. Yet intellectuals, writers and artists were part of the court's population. However, evidence from prologues of chivalric romances and poems makes clear that in their enterprise of literary production, Norwegian kings also relied on milieus outside the court: ecclesiastic centers in Norway and on Iceland.

The Norwegian Ecclesiastic Milieu

The scholarship regularly stresses the general involvement of clerics in the literary activity of 13th century Norway.²⁹¹ The clergy constituted the main learned group in Norway in the 12th and 13th century. Hardly any other groups matched the clerics' competency and know-how in writing. As we just saw, the author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* most probably belonged to the clergy. Similarly, evidence from studies on courtly literature demonstrates the Norwegian clerics' major involvement in translations. Thus *Tristrams saga* and *Elis saga* were written by a monk. The question is: Beyond the general commitment of clerics, can we identify a specific center with any precision?

²⁸⁸ Warnke 1993, 111–142.

²⁸⁹ *IA*, 385.

²⁹⁰ *j hollne med konginum. Enn stvndym upp aa kost herra Peturs.* (*Lsb*, Ch. 10).

²⁹¹ Leach 1921, 73–113; L. Lönnroth *et al.* "Literature." in K. Helle (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, Vol. 1. Cambridge University Press 2003: 487–520; Bagge 2001.

On mainland Norway, the first milieu to be considered is Nidaros. We have seen that in the 12th century, Nidaros dominated the field of written communication in general and more particularly played a chief role in the writing of official histories (see 1, 3). The tradition for history writing survived into the 13th century. Works like the *Bagler saga*, *Fagrskinna* or *Noregs konungatal* seem to have been written by clerics from Nidaros in the first decades of the 13th century. However, the trend that Sverre had started with the writing of his eponymous saga was confirmed during the following century: The competency of Nidaros clerics was not exploited for the writing of official histories, and as we will see, the task was left to Icelanders, who chose the saga genre.

If the commitment of Nidaros as center of literary production for the kingship is not plausible under Håkon Håkonsson, the fact also remains that generally we do not know much about the circumstances behind the making of this literature. With a few exceptions, most prologues or epilogues remain silent about their authors. In the current state of sources, the involvement of Nidaros remains an eventuality. Nidaros might well have been a reservoir of educated clerics which furnished competent writers for the kingship. Yet Nidaros had to share this function with other bishoprics.

What we know of the identity of the translators of French romances for the king corroborates this impression. The prologues of *Tristrams saga* and *Elis Saga* refer respectively to a *Bróðir Robert* and *Rodbert áboti*.²⁹² In addition, this Robert has tentatively been attributed the authorship of three other anonymous translations: *Ívens saga*, *Parcevals saga*, and *Möttuls saga*.²⁹³ On the basis of his name it has been suggested that he was English monk who may have entered a Norwegian monastery.²⁹⁴ The names of the monastery of Lyse and Hovedøya have been proposed recurrently because of their close connections with the British Isles.²⁹⁵

According to Tveitane, Robert may have been abbot at Lyse Abbey, a Cistercian monastery founded by English monks in 1146. The monastery was a sister house of Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, and the largest monastery in Norway.²⁹⁶

292 *Tristrams saga*, Ch. Prologue.

293 Isidro J. Rivera. 1991. "Brother Robert." in Lacy, Norris J. (ed.) *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland: 56.

294 L. Holm-Olsen. 1940. *Den gammelnorske Oversettelsen av Pamphilus. Med en Undersøkelse av Paleografi og Lydverk*. Oslo: A.W. Brøggers; Leach 1921, 179. See also in Ingvil Brügger Budal. 2009. *Strengleikar og Lais*. Ph.d.-thesis Universitetet i Bergen: 56 ff.

295 Kalinke 1981, 4.

296 M. Tveitane. 1972. *Elis saga, Strengleikar and Other Texts*. Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, Delagardieska Samlingen Nos. 4–7 Folio and AM 666b Quarto. Oslo: 26.

The situation of the monastery of Lyse is particularly interesting with respect to royal communication. Lyse was only a short distance from Bergen, c. 20–30 km. This proximity must have favored close contacts with the town and in particular with the royal court which had its seat there. Moreover, Lyse's connection with Fountains Abbey provided the Norwegian monastery with good access to European culture.²⁹⁷ Evidence of cultural contact between the two institutions lays in the fact that one of the two manuscripts extant of the *Passio et miracula Beati Olavii* comes from this library. Cultural and literary exchanges must have functioned both ways. Finally, Lyse, like Fountains Abbey, belonged to the Cistercian order, one of the most powerful orders in the Western Christendom in the High Middle Ages. The order counted over 350 abbeys throughout Europe, all of which kept in close contact with the others.²⁹⁸ The monks of Lyse thus benefitted from a rich network of monasteries and potentially received cultural and literary impulses from all over Europe.

The second institution which has been proposed as home of Brother Robert is the abbey of Hovedøya. The abbey was founded in 1147 by English monks from Lincolnshire.²⁹⁹ Like Lyse, Hovedøya was a Cistercian institution and benefitted from the same advantages in terms of cultural contacts with England and Europe. Hovedøya however differed from Lyse through its closer relationship with the Norwegian kingship, which is reflected in the dozens of privilege and protection letters issued between 1150 and 1229.³⁰⁰ According to the prologue, Robert's *Tristrams saga* was written in 1226. The *Hákonar saga* attests that before that date, the king visited the Cistercian monastery of Hovedøya on several occasions, which was by decree under his protection.³⁰¹ In 1218 and in 1221 he sojourned some days on the island and on these occasions could have become aware of the competency of its monks.³⁰² The connections between the abbey and King Håkon did not lessen in the following decades, to judge by Håkon's use of the abbot of the monastery as an envoy to Rome to arrange his coronation.³⁰³

297 Henry Goddard Leach. 1909. *The relations of the Norwegian with the English Church, 1066–1399, and their importance to comparative literature*. Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences Vol. 44, no. 20. Boston: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: 540–542.

298 Janet Burton & Kerr, Julie. 2011. *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages*. The Boydell Press: 21–55.

299 Leach 1909, 542–543.

300 *RN*, Vol. I.

301 *RN*, nr. 431.

302 *HsH*, Chs. 48, 68–70.

303 *DN I* nr. 30.

There is great uncertainty regarding Brother Robert's place of origin. The first evidence of King Håkon's literary activity seems to point to monastic institutions such as the monastery of Lyse and Hovedøya. However, the connections between the two institutions and the Norwegian kings remain vague. It does suggest however that the Norwegian kings relied on a network of ecclesiastic institutions and a reservoir of clerics from the whole kingdom to write their commands, rather than one sole center. In this respect the existence of other monastic institutions in Bergen should be mentioned, which were also able provide the court with translators. Indeed, the abbots of the Benedictine abbey of Munkeliv and the Augustine monastery of Jonskloster had close connections with the Norwegian kings, who used them as advisors and envoys for diplomatic missions abroad. The clergy also played a decisive role in the transfer of culture through their role as ambassadors. Norwegian kings used loyal men of the *hirð* in their diplomatic exchanges with foreign dignitaries; they also requested this service from prominent clerics. As the *Konungs Skuggsía* stresses, "if the king orders a clerk or an abbot or a bishop of his realm on an embassy to foreign kings or to the pope, if the king insists, he who is called is obliged to go, unless he wishes to incur the king's displeasure and be driven from his realm."³⁰⁴

Iceland

As has been repeated several times, the situation of our documentary sources prevents us from drawing a precise picture of the profile of the intellectuals who wrote for the king. However, the preceding analysis has clearly revealed a particular element: the significant presence of Icelanders among translators of romances and writers of royal biographies.³⁰⁵

This presence is not surprising. Iceland was a remarkable center of learning and of literary activity which remained unmatched during the High Middle Ages in the Norse world. From its Christianization in AD 1000 onwards, the island developed a continuous literary production of history writing and translations of foreign works. This activity was based on an exceptional combination of lay and clerical patronage. Several Icelandic monasteries conducted an intense activity in copying, translation and writing of original works, þingeyrar and Skálholt probably being the most famous. Besides these clerical centers, there also existed the rich farms of Icelandic magnates, like Reykholt, who through patronage and personal commitment generated an important body of literature. All this structure of knowledge and competency produced the main

³⁰⁴ *Kgs*, Ch. xxviii.

³⁰⁵ Barnes 2009, 189–190.

body of Norse sagas, but through copying and translations also made Western European literature, mostly in Latin and Old English, available to Northerners.³⁰⁶

The greatness of Icelandic literary achievements in the 12th and 13th century could hardly go unnoticed by a power seeking to assert its authority over society through the written word. The competency of Icelandic writers was a resource that probably was easier to exploit as the country fell under the political dominion of King Håkon Håkonsson. The circumstances around Sturla's engagement by his son illustrate the weight of this political context. Sturla arrived in Norway in 1263 as an opponent to royal annexation, but who escaped Iceland to seek Håkon's protection in joining the *hirð*. His aptitude as a poet and writer soon became known to the king, who gave him the task of writing the saga of his father and thereafter of *Járnsíða*, the book of "Norwegian" law which Magnus intended to impose on his new dominion.³⁰⁷ The redaction of *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* was more in the line of "usual" courtly patronage. With his former saga, Sturla had become an official court author who was best placed to undertake the continuation of the tale of kings.

Besides the writing of official histories, Norwegian kings were also in need of competent translators of courtly romances. Again, Icelanders possessed an expertise in the field which few in the region could match. Thus the Benedictine monastery of Þingeyrar on Iceland was an important entry point for Arthurian literature in the 13th century. Two major translations were completed there, probably by the same author, a monk named Gunnlaugr Leifsson: the *Breta sögur*, a translation into ON of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and the *Merlínússpá*, a translation of a 12th century poem in Latin, *Prophetiae Merlini*.³⁰⁸ Furthermore, Brand Jónsson, an Icelandic abbot of the monastery of Þykkvabæjar between 1247 and 1262, and Bishop of Hólar until his death in 1264, is supposed to have been the author of the *Alexander saga*, a prose translation of the Latin poem *Alexandreis*.³⁰⁹

Despite the evident predominance of Icelanders, unfortunately it is not possible to establish clear connections between Icelanders and the translations commissioned by the Norwegian kings.³¹⁰ *Erex saga* is maybe an exception. Based on a stylistic examination, Jakobsen has argued that the work was that

306 See Kristjánsson 2007; Sigurdsson 2008, 177–186; Kristinsson 2003, 1–17.

307 «Járnsíða», by Magnus M. Lárússon, KLNLM Vol. VII: 566 ff.

308 Barnes 2009, 189–190; Kristjánsson 2007, 332–333.

309 Kristjánsson 2007, 144, 333–334.

310 Marianne Kalinke. 2011a. "The Introduction of the Arthurian Legend in Scandinavia." In M. Kalinke (ed.) *The Arthur of the North. The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realm*. University of Wales Press: 15–17.

of an Icelander.³¹¹ Moreover, several philological and literary studies often suggest an Icelandic authorship in a Norwegian context. Thus a linguistic analysis of the translations of the so-called *Karlamagnús saga* suggests that the translator was an Icelander, but that the work was carried out in Norway under the reign of King Hákon Hákonsson.³¹²

Royal Ideology and Court Literature

The Norwegian court culture was the origin of secular literature of great variety: official histories, political literature and translated chivalric romances. We have seen that this literature was largely created at the instigation of the kings, but also in interaction with the aristocracy. However, the activity of patronage of kings and the mobilizing of the kingdom's intellectuals aimed at far more than catering to royal artistic tastes and ambitions. The literature produced for the Norwegian court conveyed values and norms favourable to royal power.

Official Histories and Political Literature

The historical consciousness of the 13th century Norwegian kings is evident, as is their taste for literature. The now somewhat belabored episode of King Hákon Hákonsson who on his deathbed demanded he be read past histories of kings combined with the commissioning activity of his son King Magnus Hákonsson demonstrates that Norwegian kings were aware of the use of history in the consolidation of their authority. In the 13th century, *Sverris saga*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* and *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* were the three royal biographies available to the Norwegian audience. These were not the only histories of kings though. *Morskinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and Snorri's *Heimskringla* and the *Böglunga sögur*, all creations of the 1220s, also circulated in Norway and in the Norse sphere. However, these narratives were no official histories and provided a more aristocratic view of society and of kingship.

The *Sverris saga* will be left out of this analysis because of our lack of knowledge about the exact circumstances surrounding its making and in particular its possible royal sponsorship. For other reasons we will not proceed to a detailed examination of the *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss*, as it survived in only two short fragments which basically prevents us from grasping its ideological undertones.

Hákonar saga was the official biography of King Hákon Hákonsson (1203–1263). The biographic style of the saga was in line with a tradition inaugurated with

311 A. Jakobsen. 1989. "Var oversetteren av Erex saga islending?" in *Festskrift til Finn Hødnebo*. Oslo: Novus Forlag: 130–141.

312 S. Karlsson. 1989. "Hverrar þjóðar er Karlamagnús saga? Orðfræðileg athugun." in *Festskrift til Finn Hødnebo*. Oslo: Novus Forlag: 164–179.

the *Sverris saga*. It also belonged to a wider tradition of royal biographies in medieval Europe. The biographic style aimed at distinguishing a ruler's life, deeds and doings from those of his predecessors. It inscribed the narrative of the past in a royal frame centered on the person of the king. The function of the history was thus to exalt and glorify King Håkon's achievements. The official character of the command left Sturla with little room for something different: the work was meant for the entertainment of the king and of his court. Indeed, if the author held any personal resentment against the king – and Sturla had reasons for that – none of this is clearly perceptible in the narrative. In all cases, censors – maybe these “wise men” named in the *Sturlunga saga* – kept their watchful eye on the author.³¹³

The lives of the Norwegian kings were thus integrated into a line of royal histories uninterrupted since 1177. This historiographical continuity was used as an historical argument to establish and legitimize dynastic power.

The ideology of *Håkonar saga* has been thoroughly examined by the Norwegian scholar Sverre Bagge and we will here rely on many of his conclusions.³¹⁴ The saga tells about King Håkon's difficult accession to the throne and how he defeated his rivals before he established a long-awaited peace and a strong rule. From then on, the saga recounts central events of his rule, like his crowning in 1247 and his political and military relationships with foreign kingdoms.

Much of this had a highly entertaining value. Warfare and political intrigues would fit the Norwegian aristocratic audience's taste for combat and military exploits. Håkon's expeditions against the Danes or the Scots were also able to please an audience of Norwegians by whipping up patriotic sentiment. Moreover, for a court attentive to courtly lifestyle and culture, the detailed description of the coronation ceremony of 1247 and of the festivities that followed certainly attracted public attention. But as Bagge has demonstrated, Sturla's sober and sometimes passionless narrative was permeated with a royalist ideology that aimed at rendering an exalted and idealized portrait of King Håkon Håkonsson as a monarch ruling on God's behalf. The *Håkonar saga*, perhaps to a larger extent than the *Sverris saga*, was historical propaganda. The narrative of his rule, of his struggle for the throne and of his wars against foreign menaces, is pervaded by the Christian and royalist ideal of the *rex iustus*, the sacred king as the dispenser of peace and justice.³¹⁵ In contrast to the *Sverris saga*, in *Håkonar saga* the person of the king, his personal qualities and

³¹³ *Sts*, II: 327.

³¹⁴ Bagge 1996; Bagge 1997, 215–228.

³¹⁵ Bagge 1996, 91–160.

character, is of secondary importance to the ideal king and model of sacred royalty embodied in King Håkon.

The ideology of the *Hákonar saga* finds direct echoes in the most remarkable piece of political literature in 13th century Scandinavia: The *Konungs Skuggsía*. As we have seen, the *Konungs Skuggsía* functioned as a book of conduct for the aristocracy aiming at integrating the royal *hirð*. It contains extensive information on courtly etiquette and practical advice for improving manners and behavior at court and must be considered as complementary to the chivalric literature that was translated at the court of King Håkon Håkonsson at the same time.

The *Konungs Skuggsía* was intended for the court and its royalist ideology addressed primarily the aristocracy. As Bagge has shown, the *Konungs Skuggsía* is a work of monarchic propaganda promoting a new order of society headed by a single king. It legitimizes royal supremacy through the doctrine of divine kingship: The king has his office from God to realize His will on earth. In particular, it emphasizes the function of the king as supreme judge whose justice prevails over all his subjects. It proposes a new hierarchy and new tools for social advancement: an aristocracy founded in the king's service in the *hirð*.³¹⁶

Chivalric Literature: Implementing Manners and Exalting the Kingship

Chivalric literature was a fundamental vehicle in the dissemination of courtliness and the adoption of courtly manners in European courts. From the end of the 12th century onwards, it spread to every court of Western Europe.³¹⁷ The works of Chrétien of Troyes, the true founder of the genre, everywhere were systematically translated into the vernacular. While the main themes and fabric of the stories (with some exceptions) remained untouched, they were adapted to the local audience through cultural filtering and stylistic changes.³¹⁸ However, alongside physical control and the implementation of noble conduct,

³¹⁶ Bagge 1987b.

³¹⁷ R.S. Loomis. 1959. "The Oral Diffusion of the Arthurian Legend." in R.S. Loomis (ed.) *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*. Oxford: Clarendon. For the spread of Arthurian literature in South of France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain in the 13th century, see Joan T. Grimbert. 2012. "The 'Matter of Britain' on the Continent and the Legend of Tristan and Iseult in France, Italy, and Spain." in Helen Fulton (ed.) *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*. Wiley-Blackwell: 145–159; For the diffusion of the Matière in Germany in particular see Jaeger 1985, 101–110.

³¹⁸ Bumke 2000, 99–101.

courtly literature another essential part of a broad program of exaltation of the Norwegian kingship aimed at the domestication of the aristocracy.

To a large extent the chivalric romances which the Norwegian courtiers had access to had been redacted. The epic poems, romances and fabliaux which Norwegian courtiers read or heard in the stone hall of the King's palace originally were written in Old French, Old English and Latin, and translated into Norse. These processes of selection and translations represented manifestations of royal control and reflected the Norwegian kings' ambitions. Through selection and censorship, Norwegian kings defined much of the premises for diffusion and access to courtly literature at court. Finally, the process of translation went beyond answering the need to adapt the narrative to the culture of the audience and sought to give a favorable image of the kingship in the narratives.

Making the Medium: Censorship and Translation

Like Liliane Irlenbusch-Reynard, we can question the choice of the texts which were translated into ON based on those which were not.³¹⁹ Behind the process of selection looms the shadow of censorship. In her view, the absence of certain courtly romances, which were popular in many European courts, in the corpus of translations is peculiar and can be interpreted as a form of political censorship emphasizing the political purpose of the king's program of translation. Sponsoring the translation of certain works is a means of power as much as discarding others.

The issue of censorship is central in the understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge.³²⁰ Censorship represents a powerful body's control of access to knowledge for the power's political aims.³²¹ The notion of censorship ascribes the Norwegian kingship extensive control over the culture that reached the literate elite of Norway. King Håkon's patronage represented a predominant proportion of the translated literature, although, except for some exceptions, it is difficult to estimate. Many works are of unknown origin and as we discussed earlier (see III, 4), the king probably had no monopoly over literary production. In the first decade of his reign King Håkon did not monopolize the loci for reception of court literature either. Duke Skule also possessed a court, the cultural activity of which remains difficult to assess. However, once

319 Irlenbusch-Reynard 2011.

320 Laurie Catteeuw. 2013. *Censures, et raisons d'États. Une histoire de la modernité politique (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)*. Albin Michel: 7–17, 357–362.

321 Sue C. Jansen. 1991. *Censorship: The Knot that Binds Power and Knowledge*. Oxford University Press: 3–13.

the duke disappeared in 1240, his court merged with the king's, which then became the only court in the kingdom. Håkon's control over space for communication certainly provided the king with greater control over what information and knowledge came to his court. Potential patrons must have taken into consideration the balance of power at court and, in order to avoid the king's animosity, must have censored certain works and promoted others more likely to win the kings' favor.

Irlenbusch-Reynard lists three texts that were very popular in most European courts, but which remained unknown at the Norwegian royal court: *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la charette* and *Cligès* written by Chrétien de Troyes, and *Eliduc*, one of the twelve *lais* attributed to Marie de France which was not translated in the *Strengleikar*. She argues that the main reason the translation of these works may have been consciously avoided lay in the fact that they were much too harmful to royal dignity. In *Lancelot*, Arthur is portrayed as a powerless king unable to control his knights, and as a weak man fooled by his wife and her lover. *Cligès* is also a story of an adulterous love which, according to Irlenbusch-Reynard, may have been too blasphemous for the royal translators. Finally, the conspicuous absence of the *lais Eliduc* from the translation of Marie of France's OFr *Lais* could have been motivated by the fact that the story portrayed the male hero as weak and overly emotionally sensitive for a Norse audience.³²² Irlenbusch-Reynard's analysis is pertinent as it examines the relationship between commissioner and translators in the introduction of culture at court. Yet its objections can also be raised to it. Thus, although *Cligès* contained questionable themes for the kingship, it also clearly painted a positive portrait of King Arthur as a courageous king fighting against his enemies with implacable energy, which indeed would have greatly benefitted King Håkon.³²³ Moreover, if we concede the absence of a *lais* prejudicial to the prestige of the king, what about the *lai de Lanval*, which was translated in the *Strengleikar*, where the king appears as a bad lord, depriving his vassal of honors and fiefs?³²⁴

The ON romances were adaptations rather than word for word translations. Besides being translated from Old French or Latin to Old Norse or Swedish (Eufemiavisorna), the texts also went from verse to prose in order to ease the texts' reception by an audience accustomed to sagas. Indeed, ultimately romances were turned into sagas, the so-called *Riddarasögur*. The other great transformation concerned the content of the texts. In the process of translation,

322 Irlenbusch-Reynard 2011, 392–397.

323 Martin Aurell. 2007a. *La Légende du Roi Arthur*. Perrin: 181.

324 *Ibid.*, 189–190.

translators used a whole panel of strategies ranging from abbreviation and suppression to extension.³²⁵ The motives for these transformations have been the subject of different interpretations. In order to favor its reception, the transformation was first meant to adapt the narrative to the cultural premises of the Nordic audience. In general manner this led to the systematic abridgement or complete deletion of notions and values that were believed to be foreign and unfamiliar to the readers. References to love, personal feelings and thoughts, humor, irony and eroticism at some point were discarded by the authors of *riddarasögur*, whereas they are central elements in the original versions. The alteration of the narratives is most conspicuous when it comes to love, which is the very foundation of chivalric literature. Courtly love and the general role of women in romances and poems is so greatly reduced that scholars have argued that Norse translations were “piece of [...] antifeminism.”³²⁶ On the other hand, pedagogical concern could also lead translators to make some additions, principally to explain words or notions which could have been difficult to understand for a Norwegian audience.³²⁷ In a general manner, the translations laid greater focus on plot and action than in the originals, the translators willingly eliminating descriptive stanzas as well as the writer's own comments and long monologues; this better matched the taste of Northerners. In Kalinke's view, these abridgements served the texts' entertaining purpose.³²⁸ Thus, comprehensive editing work was conducted through the translation process in order to adapt the texts to the taste and interest of the specific audience. However, the transformations resulting from the translation processes also highlighted various aspects, themes and ideas of chivalric literature that re-cast the Arthurian world in a more monarchic vein and transformed tales of knights and endless quests into vehicles for royal propaganda.

Before exploring the use of *riddarasögur* by the Norwegian monarchy, some questions remain as to the involvement of the kingship in the translation process. While little in the sources clearly confirms the existence of such a program systematically applied to all translations sponsored by the kings, it is obvious that some choices were made by the translators. Yet what do we know of the kingship's involvement in this process? Did King Håkon undertake an

325 Andrew Chesterman. 1997. *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

326 Geraldine Barnes. 1989. “Some current issues in riddarasögur research.” *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, 104, Lund: 73–88.

327 Geraldine Barnes. 1975. “The Riddarasögur and mediaeval European Literature.” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 8, Odense: 140–143.

328 Kalinke 1981, 20–45.

evaluation of the whole corpus of courtly romances and then decide which of them best served his rule? In none of the cases do we know whether omissions and transformations were deliberate. Thus stylistic transformations might have happened further down the line. In the process of copying and translations, the texts seldom remained untouched. What were the initial manuscripts used by the translator? Did he possess the full original version or simply a copy that was already abbreviated? This shows that literary transfers were complex processes about which we know far too little. This sets severe limitations to any evaluation of the political utility of translated texts.

Making the Content: Entertaining and Instructing

In the scholarship, in contrast to royal sagas and political literature, the propagandistic exploitation of *Riddarasögur* has been opposed to an interpretation privileging their entertaining function.³²⁹ In his seminal work on Anglo-Norwegian cultural relations, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, H.G. Leach wrote that “court literature [was] intended by Håkon as much for profit as for pleasure,” but later scholars have taken more radical views.³³⁰ Thus partisans of a purely entertaining approach such as Marianne Kalinke saw in the translated French romances “rather a literature of fantasy and escape intended to amuse and distract.”³³¹ At the opposite end of the scale, scholars like Geraldine Barnes state the purpose of the *Riddarasögur* is “to instruct, improve, elevate and inspire those to whom they were directed.”³³²

In a general manner, courtly culture was as much a culture of entertainment as one of knowledge. In general terms, courtliness idealized unproductive activities, and pastimes. Indeed, the use of time and resources for “unproductive” business, leisure and the pursuit of frivolous matters was a central element in the enterprise of social distinction of the elite from the rest of society.³³³ Courtly literature but also songs and poems played their part in the celebration of pleasures: pleasures of food and drink, of love and of hunting.³³⁴ Tournaments, games and chasing wild beasts with hawks and dogs were now part of aristocratic lifestyle.³³⁵

329 Glauser 2005, 379–380; Kalinke 2005, 316–363.

330 Leach 1921, 153.

331 Kalinke 1981, 45.

332 Barnes 1975, 157. From the same author see also 1989, 73–88.

333 Aurell 2002, 104–110.

334 Bumke 2000, 199–202.

335 Vale 2001, 170–200.

Apart from festivities organized in the wake of important ceremonies, the saga material does not provide instances of feasts and “parties” at the court of the Norwegian kings. The account of these festivities also throws some doubt on the success of courtly entertainment culture at the court of King Håkon the Old. For instance, despite Håkon’s coronation festivities that lasted eight days, we have no references to any tournament or jousting in the saga.³³⁶ Nevertheless, the court appears to have been a place for idleness and pleasure as well. This is indirectly confirmed by the author of the *Konungs Skuggsía*, who in the chapter dedicated to the activities and amusement of the *hirð* condemns pure entertainment as part of the life of a man of the *hirð*. The author thus casts a critical look upon games like dice and chess, which he regards as vices that ruin the gamester’s reputation.³³⁷ Similarly he denounces drinking bouts and other merry-making and instead advises courtiers to make a useful use of their free time to train with weapons and thereby increase their skills.³³⁸ The author’s ostensible dislike of entertainment confirms the fact that courtiers did use their time in games and court festivities. However, it also suggests that parts of the court did not consider it primarily as a place for recreation.

In contrast to this literature, the ambiguity between instruction and amusement in knightly romances is subject to dynamic debate. Kalinke argues that it would be wrong to consider the *Riddarasögur* as a scheme to instruct and even control its audience. According to her, the entertaining function of the *Riddarasögur* is all too clear.³³⁹ She points to the prologues of most romances that declare without ambiguity that they are written *til skemtanar oc margfræðes viðrkomande þjóða*, “for the amusement and erudition of the future generations” (*Strengleikar*), *yðr til skemmtanar*, “for your amusement” (*Elis saga*), and *til gamans ok skemtanar*, “to amuse and entertain” (*Möttuls saga*). As a further proof that this literature was primarily motivated by amusement and not instruction she notes that explicit references to didactic purposes in the original texts were systematically suppressed in their ON translation. Thereby, whereas Chrétien of Troyes stresses in the prologue of his *Éric et Énide* that each tale must include some teachings,³⁴⁰ the ON translation has simply deleted the whole prologue to directly start with the narrative.

336 Hermann Reichert. 1986. “King Arthur’s Round Table: sociological implications of its literary reception in Scandinavia.” In John Lindow, *et al.* (ed.) *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*. Odense University Press: 413.

337 *Kgs*, Ch. iv.

338 *Kgs*, Ch. xxxvii.

339 Kalinke 1981, 30–45.

340 *Éric et Énide*, v. 9–18.

Interpreting this literature essentially as a means of entertaining courtiers at the Norwegian court does not preclude all political motivations for the king. King Håkon certainly drew substantial political benefit in feeding the court with a literature coveted by all aristocrats in Europe. In sponsoring the translation of the most popular and best works, and maybe as pioneer, the king acquired an honorable reputation as enlightened ruler which matched that of the most powerful princes of Western Europe. Moreover, through his patronage he affirmed himself as an indispensable mediator of culture between his courtiers and foreign courts, and through this strengthened courtiers' dependency on the king. If courtly romances were meant to entertain their audience, the Norwegian kings and queens were "the entertainers." As such, Kalinke's view of the program of translation of Arthurian tales as "Royal entertainment" rightly enhances the dominant role of the Norwegian king in the field of distraction and pleasure at court.³⁴¹

In fact the entertaining qualities of courtly literature were not necessarily in the way of the diffusion of a political message or an ideology. The use of humor, suspense or the telling of thrilling adventures was a good means of catching readers' or listeners' attention and eased the transmission of values and ideas. Chrétien of Troyes's success seems indeed to rest on his skill to build up a narrative structure which kept the reader in suspense.³⁴² As Girbea stresses, in Chrétien's works the narrative is often interspersed with very short and almost cursory moralizing digressions, which barely interrupt the dynamism of the tale.³⁴³ If authors of knightly literature's concern to entertain their audience and to avoid elements that could provoke their boredom came at the cost of didactic functions, it largely remedied a blunder of works that were only directed by moral instructions and didacticism, which were fastidious and annoying to read or hear.³⁴⁴ Finally we should not forget that while the popularity of texts like chivalric romances precisely lay in their entertaining qualities, they also furnished a broad audience for royal propaganda. Thus, if the means of communication only enabled the transmission of an implicit political message, on the other hand its success offered this message a greater diffusion. What was lost in quality was won back in quantity.

341 Kalinke 1981, 21.

342 Aurell 2007a, 297–299.

343 Girbea 2010, 40.

344 Philippe Ménard. 1969. *Le rire et le sourire dans le roman courtois en France au Moyen Age (1150–1250)*, Genève. From the same author, *Les fabliaux, contes à rire du Moyen Age*, Paris 1983.

A Vehicle for Royal Propaganda

At the beginning, chivalric literature was not particularly suited to monarchic propaganda. Originally, chivalric literature was an aristocratic product which aimed to legitimate the aristocracy's social standing against the rise of the monarchy and the development of a non-noble elite. Literature contributed to building up a common identity and culture based on specific norms and values which led to a greater social differentiation. Moreover, the didactic and propagandistic function of knightly literature is also evident in its use by clerics as a vehicle for religious ideas and norms among the lay aristocracy. As Girbea's studies reveal, authors of Arthurian romances delivered more or less explicit messages of conversion, punctuating their stories with moral digressions and introducing edifying sermons.³⁴⁵

Despite these impediments, very soon this literature was exploited by kings. Royal involvement in and instrumentalization of courtly literature cannot be fully appreciated if we overlook the context in which it was created and adopted in the 12th and 13th century.

Courtly culture developed in European courts during turbulent political times when the growth of monarchic power exacerbated tensions with the aristocracy. Control over the aristocracy was a central issue for Plantagenet kings, who had to face opposition and even open rebellion from local noblemen and even within the royal family itself during most of the 12th century.³⁴⁶ In late 12th century Capetian France as well, the growth of monarchic power developed in the context of feudal rivalry with the barons, who were increasingly excluded from government.³⁴⁷ Similarly, the period of the civil war between Hohenstaufen and Welfs in the first decades of the 13th century corresponded to the rise of courtliness in German courts.³⁴⁸ These royal courts played a decisive role in the diffusion of courtly culture and of its principal vector, courtly literature.

The translation of OFr and Latin romances at the Norwegian court served the kings' strategy of conveying an ideology favorable to their rule through the

345 Girbea 2010. From the same author, 2007. "Discours persuasifs et conscience religieuse dans les romans arthuriens (XIIe–XIIIe siècles)," in Aurell 2007c: 153–190 and 2011. "Chevalerie, adoubement et conversion dans quelques romans du Graal," in Martin Aurell & Catalina Girbea (dir.) *Chevalerie & christianisme aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes: 179–199.

346 Aurell 2007b.

347 Franck Collard. 1999. *Pouvoirs et culture politique dans la France médiévale Ve–XVe siècle*. Paris: Hachette: 138–141.

348 Bumke 2000, 469–475.

exaltation of the kingship and the promotion of court and ideal models of knighthood.

As previously noted, chivalric romances were not necessarily favorable to the kingship. Yet, the process of translations in ON somehow corrected the picture. In the translated works from the *Matter of Britain*, kings and King Arthur in particular are endowed with a greater dignity and stature, and royal authority is largely more revered than in the master texts by Chrétien de Troyes or Marie de France.

The author of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* emphasized to a greater degree than in the original version two episodes where King Arthur fights and defeats two giants who were threatening his kingdom, thus allowing the author to show King Arthur's power and courage, and exalt his duty as protector.³⁴⁹ It is not only King Arthur who benefits from better treatment. In the same saga King Mark is less the powerless ruler fooled by his knight and the weak man abused by his wife than in the original version.³⁵⁰ In the *Möttuls saga*, while the translator largely kept the ironic and humorous tone that characterizes the original work, the different abridgements significantly re-centered the comedy away from the king and his knights towards the women. If we also consider that the author of the translation meaningfully extended the description of the king with eulogizing details emphasizing his generosity and bravery, we have a work that no longer makes fun of King Arthur and his vassals, but a romance celebrating royal dignity.³⁵¹ In *Erex saga*, the king is portrayed as a powerful and courageous warrior who tracks down his enemy implacably, whereas Chrétien's version emphasized the king's piety and goodness.³⁵² The transformation of Arthur into a powerful ruler is even more obvious in an episode where the king is criticized for a decision by one of his knights. Whereas Chrétien willingly portrays Arthur

349 Geraldine Barnes. 2011. "The Tristan Legend." In M. Kalinke (ed.) *The Arthur of the North. The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realm*. University of Wales Press: 62.

350 Paul Schach. 1965. "The Style and Structure of Tristrams saga." in Carl, F. Bayerschmidt and Erik, J. Friis (ed.) *Scandinavian Studies. Essays Presented to Dr. Henry Goddard Leach on the Occasion of his Eighty-Fifth Birthday*. Seattle: University of Washington Press: 75–76.

351 Geraldine Barnes. 1974. *The Riddarasögur: A literary and Social analysis*. PhD-thesis, Department of Scandinavian Studies. University College London Barnes: 148; Carolyne Larrington. 2011. "The Translated Lais." In M. Kalinke (ed.) *The Arthur of the North. The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realm*. University of Wales Press: 85–86.

352 Claudia Bornholdt. 2011. "The Old Norse-Icelandic Transmission of Chrétien de Troyes' Romances: Ívens saga, Erex saga, Parcevals saga with Valvens þáttur." In M. Kalinke (ed.) *The Arthur of the North. The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realm*. University of Wales Press: 112–120.

as a frivolous and dictatorial ruler, rightly admonished by a loyal vassal, the king of the saga is presented as a powerful sovereign claiming full obedience from his subjects.³⁵³ In *Ívens saga*, Chrétien's ironic views are also removed from the depictions of King Arthur. On the contrary, the author draws a portrait of the king as the paragon of knightly virtue, courteous, wise and generous and a true leader of courageous knights.³⁵⁴ Similarly, the translation of *Perceval* in ON lays greater emphasis on King Arthur's generosity and concern for his knights than the original version. This result was not achieved by way of extensive modifications, but through systematic adaptation of the description of King Arthur and his court to the Norwegian values and *hirð* organization, which made the royal court more "understandable" to a Norwegian audience.³⁵⁵

Other works translated from the *Matter of France* glorified royal dignity even more explicitly. Over the course of the 12th and early 13th century, several OFr *chansons de gestes* and a now lost *Life of Charlemagne*, relating the life of the emperor and his knights, were translated into prose in nine sagas³⁵⁶: *Upphaf Karlamagnús*, *Af Oddgeiri danska*, *Af Agulando konungi*, *Af Gvitalín Saxa*, *Af Otúel*, *Af Jóršaleferð*, *Af Rúnzívals bardaga*, *Af Vilhjálmi korneis*, and *Um kraftaverk og jartegnir*. While the sagas were later compiled in the *Karlamagnús saga*, they must still be considered independently, each text having been translated in a specific context and for a special purpose.³⁵⁷

The sagas are characterized by a great diversity. Some were clearly suitable to royal eulogy whereas others clearly were not. Five sagas stand out in their positive portrait of the emperor. In *Upphaf Karlamagnús*, Charlemagne is depicted a tenacious fighter against the pagans. He is also a strong and generous ruler, able to foil his barons' plots. Similarly, in the translation of the *Chanson de Roland* (*Af Rúnzívals bardaga*), in contrast to the master version, the text is expurgated of episodes relating aristocratic rebellion (Ogier, Ganellon) and the weakness of the emperor before his knights.³⁵⁸

353 *Erex saga*.

354 Irlenbusch-Reynard 2004, 255.

355 Suzanne Marti. 2010. *Kingship, Chivalry and Religion in the Perceval Matter. An Analysis of the Old Norse and Middle English Translations of Le Conte du Graal*. PhD Thesis University of Oslo: 116–117.

356 A tenth one (Branch 11), the *Af frú ólífog Landrés syni hennar* was a ON translation of the *chanson de geste*, Olive et Landri. The translation was a command by Bjarne Erlingsson in the 1280s.

357 Joanna Kjær. 1998. "Karlamagnus saga: La Saga de Charlemagne." *Revue des langues romanes* Vol. 102, nr. 1: 9.

358 Daniel W. Lacroix. 2000. *La saga de Charlemagne*. Librairie Générale Française: 736–752.

In the three sagas of *Af Gvitalín Saxa*, *Af Agulando konungi*, and *Um kraftaverk og jartegnir* Charlemagne embodies the warrior king ceaselessly fighting against the pagans, personally leading his armies and killing his enemies. The sainted dimension of Charlemagne is a major element in these sagas. The emperor fights for the Christian faith against the pagans and is the first protector of Christendom. His wars and victories are those of God as well, the emperor's unfailing ally from his accession to the throne to his death. In a general manner, the focus on the emperor, his achievements and his power was proportionally increased by the reduction, in the translations, of many courtly and supernatural elements. Thus, in *Af Agulando konungi*, following the account of Charlemagne's successful campaign, the translator reduced to two and a half sentences the thousands of verses dedicated to converted female pagans who were married to Frenchmen. These omissions may have been dictated simply by stylistic considerations, but as Kjær suggests, they could also been purposeful.³⁵⁹

However, as mentioned earlier, other translated versions of the *Matter of Britain* and *Matter of France* clearly conveyed a negative picture of Charlemagne and can hardly be considered royal propaganda. King Arthur does not appear to advantage in the lai *Januals ljóð*, where he is portrayed as capricious, ungrateful, and a man unable to control his wife's sexual needs.³⁶⁰ Texts like *Af Jóršaleferð*, *Af Oddgeiri danska* and *Af Otúel* largely undermine the laudatory picture given in the aforementioned sagas. In particular, *Af Jóršaleferð* parodies the image of the emperor with extensive use of humor and irony, portraying him as a chatterbox, a feeble man manipulated by his wife, and obsessed with his looks. Finally in *Af Oddgeiri danska* and *Af Otúel* the emperor is presented as an old and weak man dependent on his vassals to rule and the object of women's mockery.³⁶¹

Finally, the court was the origin of chivalric literature and in turn, the court of the king is central in it and in Arthurian romance in particular. It is the starting point of every adventure of the knights and the place they come back to to celebrate their triumph.³⁶² The interest in and focus of translators on the royal court is conspicuous in the three ON translations, *Erex saga*, *Ívens saga* and *Parcevals saga*, as all action unfolding within the court is systematically kept close to the original version, without significant abridgments and alterations, whereas all the heroes' doings outside the precinct of the court are readily abbreviated.³⁶³ Emphasis on the court is also strong in the *Möttuls saga*. As Barnes has

359 Kjær 1998, 17 and 64–65.

360 Larrington 2011, 84.

361 Lacroix 2000, 190–202, 690–708, 820–830.

362 E. Köhler. 1974. *L'Aventure chevaleresque. Idéal et réalité dans le roman courtois*. Paris: 42.

363 Barnes 1975, 147–148.

shown, the author of the ON translation apparently was not satisfied with the OFr original description of Arthur and his court as he readily extended the chapter from 28 words to 106!³⁶⁴ The emphasis on the Arthurian court served to promote the royal court and consequently the stature and authority of its most prominent representative, King Håkon Håkonsson.

The unique dimension acquired by the court in Old Norse translations is consolidated by the conspicuous absence of references to the Round Table in the *riddarasögur*.³⁶⁵ The Round Table was an important motif in Arthurian legend and the focal point of Arthur's court. It was the table where the king and his knights sat together. In romances it was the central *locus* of the courtier, where everything starts and ends. The Round Table was a powerful symbol of the unity that bonded King Arthur and his knights, an idealization of their relationship. It also projected a specific image of the ruler. The king of Arthurian literature is a feudal king who rules over his kingdom with the help and advice of his knights.³⁶⁶ The Round Table around which the king and his most loyal knights sit symbolizes the collegiality of his rule and some form of equality.³⁶⁷ Yet King Arthur is not *primus inter pares*. King Arthur always maintains pre-eminence over his knights, which is particularly blatant when he metes out justice; although the king listens to the advice of his knights, he always takes the final decisions.³⁶⁸ The "disappearance" of the Round Table from Old Norse translations however elided a unique symbol of equality which, combined with the glorification of the kingship, emphasized the subordinate relationship of the aristocracy to the kings.

Diffusion and Reception

Diffusion: Manuscript Evidence

We see that kings led the making of a literature exalting royal power, chivalric obedience and submission. In order to succeed, however, these works needed to find an audience. Did the Norwegian kings put in effort so that their literary production was largely spread? We have very few indications of the number of copies of these texts. Our sole evidence is based on the number of manuscripts extant.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁶⁵ Reichert 1986, 394–414.

³⁶⁶ W. Störmer. 1972. "König Artus als aristokratisches Leitbild während des späteren Mittelalters." *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landgeschichte*, Vol. 35: 946–971; P. Johanek. 1987. "König Arthur und die Plantagenets." *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, Vol. 21: 346–389.

³⁶⁷ Chauou 2001, 138–145.

³⁶⁸ Aurell 2007a, 318.

The *Konungs Skuggsía* has survived in 31 copies. Five manuscripts are from the 13th century, whereas the remaining 26 were written between the 14th and the 17th century. It is striking that these five older copies are Norwegian, whereas the later copies are all Icelandic. The large number of copies suggests that the *Konungs Skuggsía* was popular. But the Norwegian origin of the 13th century copies demonstrates that the work was significantly widespread in Norway.³⁶⁹ The *Hákonar saga* is known through 15 copies. The three oldest ones are dated from 1300–1325, whereas the youngest is from the 17th century. None of them are Norwegians.³⁷⁰ Finally, the *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss*, as we know, has survived in only two fragments from an Icelandic manuscript from c. 1400.³⁷¹

Although it is believed that Arthurian literature was translated in Norway, only one single narrative has survived in Norwegian manuscripts: *Strengleikar* exists in a single manuscript (De la Gardie 4–7) written in Bergen between 1250 and 1270.³⁷² To a large extent, the manuscript transmission took place through late medieval Icelandic manuscripts.³⁷³ Judging from the corpus of manuscripts extant (c. 800), *Riddarasögur* were enormously popular in Iceland, even if this success must be seen over several centuries.³⁷⁴ Finally, five manuscripts or fragments of *Karlamagnús saga* exist, all Icelandic. The oldest is from the second half of the 12th century and the most recent from the late 17th century.³⁷⁵

The small number of copies and *a fortiori* of copies made in the 13th century prevent us from estimating the level of diffusion of these texts. Nevertheless, they still allow valuable insights. The fact that Norwegian copies are seldom, with some exceptions, suggests the limits of the Norwegian scene as a center of production. However, the example of the *Konungs Skuggsía*, viewed in comparison to narrative literature, may demonstrate the existence of a particular Norwegian tradition and interest in political literature. The recurrent overrepresentation of copies extant from Iceland shows that chivalric literature, official historiographies as well as the *Konungs Skuggsía* were spread throughout the Northern world beyond Norway and its royal court.

369 A.W. Brøgger. 1947. "Efterskrift." *Kongespeilet*. H. Aschehoug & CO: 224–229.

370 Marina Mundt. 1977. "Innledning." *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. Kjeldeskriftfondet: XI–XXXVI.

371 The list is made from the register of *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*. Den arnamagnæanske commission: København 1989.

372 Larrington 2011, 79.

373 For the *Matter of Bretagne* see more particularly the study by Kalinke 201b, 22–47.

374 Kalinke 2005, 320.

375 «Karlamagnus saga», by E.F. Halvorsen, KLN M Vol. VIII: 286.

The French historian Bernard Guénée has developed a method of estimating the success of a work in the Middle Ages. It is based on the counting of extant manuscripts and the appreciation of their social and geographical diffusion. According to Guénée's method, a work had zero success if it exists in two or less manuscripts, slight success with c. six manuscripts, limited success with fifteen, significant success with thirty and great success for sixty or more.³⁷⁶ If we match our numbers with his empirical method, we must concede that none of our works had any significant success in Norway. Yet, this "lack of success" is relative, as the Old Norse literature addressed a limited and local audience which did not necessitate an important number of manuscripts to cover the needs for reception.

Reception

The translated romances addressed mainly the limited audience of the nobility and more specifically the nobility at Scandinavian courts. Indeed, chivalric literature was shaped for an aristocratic audience through a process of translation – from verse to prose, from Latin/OFr/German to Norse, based on local technical and cultural premises to ease the reception of foreign literature by a Northern audience. Similarly, the emphasis on plot and action as well as the "cleansing" of "foreign" references were meant to adapt the narratives to the taste of Northern aristocrats used to the style of sagas.

The translation of foreign literature implied huge effort – not only financial but also in terms of mobilizing a network – that was probably provided mainly by the kingship. Nonetheless it has been made clear that the diffusion of courtly culture and romances in Norway was not a one-way process, but as much the doing of kings as that of nobles. The demand from the nobility and their involvement in the process of import indeed blur the line between sender and audience. The genuine interest of the Norwegian aristocracy must have significantly eased the condition for the reception of the values and norms conveyed in the ON translations. The sparse but regular examples of aristocratic patronage confirm the existence of an uninterrupted tradition of importing foreign courtly literature and of a constant interest for the genre. The amendment of 1309 shows courtiers' appetite for foreign fashions never diminished, but on the contrary remained strong nearly a hundred years after the beginning of King Håkon Håkonsson's program. Translated romances reached their audience and thus appear to have been a reliable means for the Norwegian king to achieve his political ambitions in Norway at the court.

³⁷⁶ Guénée 1980, 249–274.

The reception of chivalric literature specifically and of courtly literature in general could also provide the kingship with a reliable means to spread its propaganda to other social and geographical horizons than the royal court. Literary evidence shows that the ideals and values present in the courtly literature spread outside the immediate circle of the court and the aristocratic elite in society. The heroes of Arthurian literature were very popular outside the aristocratic class, and from the mid-13th century onward the names of the Knights of the Round Table were increasingly used as patronymic names in the population.³⁷⁷ Judging from the corpus of extant manuscripts (c. 800), Arthurian literature was particularly popular in Iceland. The contribution of the island and of its scribes to the introduction of chivalric literature remains obscure, although some evidence suggests their decisive involvement. There is no doubt however that the legend of Arthur significantly influenced Icelandic writers, who eagerly borrowed names and themes into their works.³⁷⁸ The diffusion of values favorable to the Norwegian kingship in the Norse cultural sphere and in Iceland in particular was crucial in a time when Norwegian kings were engaged in a policy of expansion in Iceland. Indeed, according to Eriksen, the royal policy of translations of courtly romances was meant to reach a popular audience in Iceland.³⁷⁹

The *Konungs Skuggsía* provides an interesting illustration of the use of the court and courtly literature as a means of increasing the authority of Norwegian kings outside the court as far as the remote island. In particular, the allegories present in *Konungs Skuggsía* may have been used to promote an ideology of peace favorable to the Norwegian monarchy in a country torn apart by internal feuds and political rivalry. This monarchic propaganda may have pervaded Icelandic society directly through the diffusion of the book and indirectly through contacts at court with Icelanders (men of the *hirð*, hostages and merchants).³⁸⁰

The reflection of royal dominance is also found in the conditions of reception. Despite the progress in literacy, courtiers' access to literature largely remained oral.³⁸¹ This is constantly attested in the prologues of political literature as well as in translated romances and poems. For instance, the author of *Konungs Skuggsía* addresses his audience as "all good men who

377 Pastoureau 2004, 293–304.

378 Kalinke 2011a, 221.

379 Eriksen 2007, 99–135.

380 Brégaint 2013, 439–466.

381 See Saenger Paul H. 1997. *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*. Stanford University Press:120–148.

hear this book.”³⁸² In a similar manner, the prologue of *Ívens saga* (1303) clearly points to an audience of listeners it aims to entertain: “to present an old saga for the pleasure of those who will hear it.”³⁸³ *Elis Saga* starts with “Hear, wise men, a great story of high value about the valiant knight.”³⁸⁴ As a final example we can name the *Lai of Bisclaret*, a “story which you have now heard.”³⁸⁵

The public reading aloud of epic poems as well as knightly romances and sagas was a theatrical performance gathering a large audience and which could even be accompanied by music as suggested in translated romances: in *Tristrams saga*, Tristram composed his poem for the harp,³⁸⁶ and the author of the *lai of Equitan* stresses that it was composed “for stringed instruments.”³⁸⁷ As such it needed a suitable space. The material aspects of the reception of courtly culture and literature cannot be easily determined, but as we have seen, the literary sponsorship of Norwegian kings was accompanied by strong construction activity in the royal residences in Bergen, Tønsberg and Oslo. It consisted in particular in the building or extension of large halls able to welcome great gatherings for ceremonies and festivities. The great halls of Holmen in Bergen and Tønsbergshus (Tønsberg) fitted a court life given a certain rhythm by sessions of group readings of poetry and sagas. By the end of the 13th century the royal residence in Oslo welcomed the literate milieu of Queen Euphemia who received the place in dowry in 1305.³⁸⁸

Descriptions of collective reading performances at the 13th century Norwegian court are scarce. The example of King Håkon Håkonsson who was read Latin and Norse histories on his deathbed may be as much an indicator that reading aloud and listening were usual practices as a compulsory exercise due to Håkon’s weakness or limited reading skills. Meals appear to have provided opportunities for collective reading. The *Hirðskrá* regulates the systematic reading of the law during meals at Christmas.³⁸⁹ Similarly Abbot Robert points to meals as the favored time for hearing his *Elis saga*, emphasizing however that food for thought was far better than filling the belly. Indeed the author

382 *Ad þeir er bokina heyra* (Kgs, prologue).

383 *Forna saghu fram att föra / them til skemptan ther a wiæ hōra* (*Ívens saga*, prologue).

384 *Heyre hoskir menn eina fræga frasaugn af einum dyrum kappi* (*Elis saga*, 1).

385 *af þæssare sogu er þer havet nu hæyrt*. (*Strengleikar*, 98).

386 Larrington 2011, 80.

387 *ekuitans lið i strænlaekum huersu* (*Strengleikar*, 82).

388 *DN* III, nr 61.

389 *Hsk*, Ch. 54.

did not see eating as a handicap for reception, providing listeners would refrain from drinking too much.³⁹⁰

Collective reading was an essential element of aristocratic social life. However, it also bore the mark of royal power. The reception of foreign literature at court was strongly structured and controlled by the crown. Our few pieces of source evidence clearly suggest that courtly literature was a public performance including numerous protagonists such as the speaker, musicians, maybe actors and the audience, which only the great halls of the royal palaces and the economic resources of kings could provide. The decisive involvement of kings in the performance is also illustrated in the general meals, which were organized and supervised by the kings, and provided an opportunity for collective reading.

Impact

Courtly romances which were adapted and translated into ON, and political treaties like the *Konungs Skuggsía* illustrate the efforts made by intellectuals at court to introduce new and often “unnatural” norms and values to the aristocracy. But did this enterprise succeed? Were these new standards internalized in the warriors’ comportment?

It must first be made clear that although the impact of communication is essential for the understanding of communication system, the drying up of narrative sources at the end of the 13th century, when the effects of this “civilizing” process may have become visible, on the whole prevent us from really gauging the reception of these ideas and norms. It also increases the danger of interpreting signs of “effects” as evidence of the success or failure of royal communication. Many social, economic and political factors and processes were also at play and distinguishing the work of literature can be quite a daring challenge.

The internalization of aristocratic norms by the Norwegian medieval nobility is subject of a long-lasting debate in the scholarship. Hans E. Kinck in his “*Storhetstid*” paints a highly romantic portrait of Scandinavians in the Middle Ages, who bore *urgammal*, “ancient” values and views from time immemorial, to the author’s present times. In his view, Western European cultural impulses such as the ideal of courtesy never took root in the mind and doings of the Northern people, but remained a kind of superficial snobbism.³⁹¹ Newly, Hans Jakob

390 *Elis saga*, Ch. xv.

391 H.E. Kinck. 1922. *Storhetstid. Om vort aandsliv og den literære kultur i det trettende aarhundre*. Oslo: Aschehoug: 37.

Orning has also largely stressed continuity in mentalities and behavior.³⁹² In contrast, Fredrik Paasche, Edvard Bull and Sverre Bagge believed that the imported culture made its way in the mentalities of the Norwegian aristocracy.³⁹³

When it comes to the issues of consolidated loyalty to the king, the reduction of aristocratic violence, and the progress of learning and literacy in the aristocracy, the contexts of the 13th and 14th centuries reveal different pictures.

The king's sagas suggest that the court of Håkon and his successors was more peaceful and experienced somewhat fewer internal conflicts than during the period of the civil war. This is however drawn on an *argumentum ex silentio*. We have suggested on some occasions that Sturla could have consciously remained silent on tensions at court precisely to avoid reviving them. In addition, the sagas probably had a normative function and avoided displaying aristocratic violence in the narrative as a means of emphasizing the primacy of royal justice. However, some episodes demonstrate that the royal court was not free of conflicts. We have previously mentioned the serious conflict between the Icelander Þorgils Skarði and Earl Knut in Nidaros in the winter of 1250–51. Generally it is difficult to assess how aristocratic violence diminished, if indeed it did, in the Central Middle Ages. It is even more difficult to assert the impact of the kings' "civilizing" program in this development. Court literature was not the only means by far of controlling this violence. The legislative activity of kings also imposed severe penalties for feuds and murders. The laws of 1260 and 1274 forbade revenge on persons guilty of murder. Yet several examples in the early 14th century attest that a "feud culture" still prospered in the lay elite.³⁹⁴

We have no instances, in our sources, of open disloyalty against the Norwegian kings after the period of the civil war. After Duke Skule's death and throughout the 13th century no prominent magnate openly opposed them. The exception which proves the rule is the conflict between Earl Alf Erlingsson and Duke Håkon Magnusson in the late 1280s.³⁹⁵ But the duke was not king. In a general manner the Norwegian aristocracy distinguished itself from its European counterpart for its loyalty to the kings at the end of the 13th century.

392 Orning 2008, 10–34; From the same author, 2010: 249–262.

393 Frederick Paasche. 1924. *Norske Litteraturhistorie. Vol. 1. Norges og Islands litteratur indtil utgangen av middelalderen*. Oslo: Aschehoug: 310–365; Edvard Bull. 1931. *Det Norske Folks Liv og Historie Gjennem Tidene. Frå omkring 1000 til 1280*. Oslo: Aschehoug: 364–380; Bagge 2000.

394 See for instance Erik Opsahl. 2007. *Feider og fred i nordisk middelalder*. Unipub.

395 Helle 1964, 183–184.

The aristocracy's loyalty is stressed during the infancy of King Eirik. In the 1280s the barons embraced a clear pro-monarchic policy, directed in particular against the Church. They defended the authority and interests of the king against the claims of Archbishop Jon to greater jurisdictional and economic autonomy. It is true that in the defense of these rights the aristocracy was also taking care of its own interests, for instance in negotiating tax exemptions. It must be noted though that these exemptions were not as significant as those granted the Swedish aristocracy with the *Alsnó stadga* (1280).³⁹⁶ However, the opinion that the kingship and the aristocracy shared the same interests can also be interpreted precisely as the direct result of decades of ideological activity at court, where the defense and support of the king were central elements.

Did the fact that royal ideology made use of the vehicle of written communication result in an impact on the aristocracy's relationship to culture and writing? In other words, did Norwegian Vikings finally become *miles literati*? Courtly romances met with great success at most European courts, not only as a result of princely involvement, but in response to the courtiers' genuine interest.³⁹⁷ In France, Germany and Italy we even have numerous examples of nobles indulging in the writing of romances and poems.³⁹⁸ In Norway we have very few examples of aristocrats known as patrons of literature, and none as writers. Epistolary evidence also reveals a limited growth in the Norwegian aristocracy's use of writing. Roughly from 1250 to 1350, we count a few dozen extant letters issued by members of the aristocracy for personal correspondence.³⁹⁹ For the 14th century, Jan R. Hagland observed a constant increase from 1310 to 1350 for a total of 550 letters.⁴⁰⁰ Norwegian literary production also experienced a clear decline in the late 13th/early 14th century. On the basis of the Norwegian source material it is thus difficult to clearly define the court's responsibility in the progress of literacy among the Norwegian aristocracy, although it certainly played its part. In any cases, the source situation for the period examined does not allow us to conclude that the Norwegian aristocracy was significantly literate as to constitute a substantial and autonomous group of *miles literati* in a comparable manner to their French or English counterparts.

396 «Frälse», by Jerker Rosén, KLN Vol. IV: 681–692.

397 Bumke 2000, 512–518.

398 Aurell 2006, 164–208.

399 Bjarne Bjerulfen. 1948. *Kulturtradisjon fra en storhetstid*, Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag: 134–160.

400 J.R. Hagland. 2005. *Literacy i norsk seinmellomalder*. Novus forlag: 17.

7 The Axes of Political Rituality

13th century kings appropriated not only the written word for their communication. Coronation ceremonies, royal funerals and marriages as well as rituals of *konungstekja* increasingly formed axes of the kings' ritual and political communication.

The urban character of the rituals and ceremonies of kingship secured a great audience and made them decisive elements in the communication of kings.⁴⁰¹ On the occasion of the election of Håkon Håkonsson at the *Eyrapping* in 1217, the saga notes: "that day on which the *Eyrapping* was summoned a great host of freemen out of the districts came to the town, as was the custom when a king was chosen."⁴⁰² The ritual was not only limited to the town, but also attracted people outside its precincts. As centers for trade and exchange placed on the main communication routes, towns also were gates to the outside world, favoring the presence of foreigners in the audience of rituals. According to *Laurentius saga*, the crowning of King Håkon Magnusson of 1319 attracted a large domestic and foreign audience: "Thither now came all the first men in Norway and from other lands and wide. There could be seen the greatest throng ever known in the Northern lands."⁴⁰³

These rituals reached audiences significant not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of social status, gathering the most powerful actors in the realm as well as representatives of the different groups of society: the lay aristocracy from the whole realm, princes and magnates from foreign kingdoms and the Norwegian clergy, who played a chief role in the rituals and who frequently seized the opportunity to summon a general council.

We have seen above how the Church increased its hold over rituals of royal succession during the civil war (1130–1240) through the introduction of a new ritual (coronation ceremony) and of religious liturgy into traditional rituals (*konungstekja*). With the return of political stability in the early 1240s and the establishing of monarchic rule, the Norwegian kingship was in a stronger position to turn the rituals and ceremonies of succession into instruments dedicated to the exaltation of royal authority and dynastic power.

401 David Brégaint. 2013. "De Nidaros à Bergen. Villes et Communication en Norvège aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles," *Nordic Historical Review*, Vol. 16: 37–59.

402 *Dag þann er Eyra-þing var stefnt kom til Bæjarinnis fioldi bonnda af hierodumm sem sidur er til þa er kong skal taka* (HsH, Ch. 17).

403 *komú þar þa aller hiner fremstú menn j Noregi og vyda annar stadar af londum, mátti þar síá hinn mesta mvq sem verda kunne á norðr londum* (Lsb, Ch. 13).

In the present chapter we will examine how the Norwegian kingship asserted its ascendancy over the rituals and ceremonies of kingship and used them in its communication with society. We will first examine how Norwegian kings exploited royal crownings and funerals to enforce their political programs. Second, we will address the very premises for this exploitation: control over the *loci* of ritual communication and through the performance of kings and of their agents.

Using Rituals: Ceremonial Politics

Helle has shown that throughout the High Middle Ages there was a growing need for the kingship to organize “national” meetings, where the king could discuss nationwide issues and policies with the different social groups. Between 1247 and 1280, King Håkon Håkonsson and his successor arranged political meetings almost yearly.⁴⁰⁴ While these meetings achieved great things, those held in the wake of central royal ceremonies acquired greater significance as the prestige, the authority and legitimacy which they conferred upon the king was reflected in the discussion of important political issues. In the source material we see that crowning ceremonies, royal funerals, marriages and royal entries were part of extensive communication operations aiming at enforcing royal policies and consolidating royal power in 13th-century Norway. We can distinguish three central issues for the kingship which reverberated in the ceremonies: its relationship to the Church, its relationship to the lay aristocracy, and finally, the political ambitions of the kings abroad, principally Iceland.

In order to really understand rituals and ceremonies as a system for royal communication it is necessary to consider them as a communication structure composed of three different communication units. Each of these units addressed a specific audience in a definite fashion for an appropriate purpose.

Thus meetings were organized prior to the ceremonies for the preparation of the events. They concerned essentially practical matters inherent in the organization of the gathering of hundreds of guests for several days. They also dealt with the planning of the rituals’ staging, defining the role of each participant and their involvement in the process. Rituals and ceremonies of the Norwegian kingship were first and foremost major political happenings, where the foundations of kingship were redefined. The Church and the nobility were closely involved, and the preparation was the object of a power game concerning rights and privileges. Indeed, this unit of communication was also that of the Church, which used to arrange general synods. These councils gathered the

404 Helle 1972, 278.

whole clergy of the realm and were used not only to address doctrinal issues, but also to define the Church's position towards the kingship.

The ceremonies proper were pivotal in the organization of the pre- and post-celebrations. They constituted the apex of the whole system. In 13th-century Norway, these were religious ceremonies (crowning, burial, marriage and *konungstekja*) that followed specific rules and a defined liturgy administered by the Church. Through the ceremony, the kingship experienced a more or less radical change: A crowning transformed the king into a sacred sovereign; royal funerals marked the end of one reign and the start of a new one; a royal marriage sealed a new alliance of the crown with foreign princely families; finally, the ritual of the *konungstekja* "made" a king. Although the liturgy defined a clear frame for action, it still left room for political adjustment.

The last phase was the celebration of the king's new status and position. It abandoned the sphere of the religious to enter that of worldly festivities: banquets and feasts. While this phase did not follow religious regulations, it was not free of rules. As we will see, the festivities were tightly structured around speeches from participants, public meetings and reunions. They also increasingly followed codes and etiquettes for table service, seating arrangements and entertainment. The phase of celebration was a crucial unit of communication for the kingship: First, because it often escaped ecclesiastical control of the location for symbolic communication (the church, cemetery) and the liturgical rules which regulated the ceremony's staging (*Ordines Coronationis* and burial liturgy), instead involving the crown in the organization and staging of the events to a greater extent. Second, this unit was intimately bound to the ceremony proper. The symbolic importance of the religious ceremonies carried over into the adjacent phases and established new premises for communication and political exploitation. Strong in his new status, the king was able to conduct his communication with greater force and efficiency, turning this last communication unit into a remarkable political instrument.

The Crowning of King Håkon Håkonsson 1247

The crowning of King Håkon Håkonsson differed significantly from earlier royal coronation ceremonies (1163, 1194) in the sense that it was a very well-prepared event. The first step had been to obtain the support of the Church. The coronation of 1247 was preceded by intense discussions between the clergy and the king. In 1245, when the king announced to his bishops that the pope had written in a letter that he was willing to accept Håkon's coronation, the prelates had immediately started discussions about the Church's liberties.⁴⁰⁵

405 HsH, Ch. 247.

They bargained with the writing of the king's answer to the pope, attempting to persuade Håkon to swear the oath which King Magnus Erlingsson had taken some eighty years earlier. The king circumvented the pressure from the bishops by addressing Rome directly, where his request was warmly welcomed.⁴⁰⁶ Besides the ceremony's political issues, there were also practical ones to consider. In spring of 1247, Håkon started to prepare the festivities. He sent ships abroad and in particular to England in order to gather food supplies and other necessities.⁴⁰⁷

Cardinal William's welcome to the town of Bergen must be considered the inaugural act of this operation of royal communication. His arrival in Norway on 17 June 1247 was the occasion for a great display of royal power. His arrival was thoroughly prepared. William's entrance into the bay of Bergen was preceded by an exchange of messengers, who informed the legate about Håkon's plans for his welcome the following day. The legate answered that "he would abide by the king's counsel as to his doings."⁴⁰⁸ The saga recounts that in the morning the cardinal was welcomed on his boat by the king in person, accompanied by an important flotilla bearing all his retinue and his liegemen.⁴⁰⁹ This reception made so strong an impression on the cardinal that later, during a public speech, he admitted that he had "never seen more ships in one haven."⁴¹⁰ This demonstration of force was intended to impress the Roman legate while also showing him the greatest respect and honor. But the spectacle was also intended for the local population, who had the unique possibility to experience a royal crowning and to see the Holmen's host in all its splendor. Finally, the cardinal's entry was more specifically intended for the town's clergy and the bishops, who had bargained very hard about their participation in the coronation. The arrival of the papal legate into Bergen accompanied by the king and his entourage was a glaring symbol of the king's success in overriding his clergy's opposition to the project.

Once on shore, the cardinal was met by a procession, this time composed of bishops, priests and monks, which led him to the general assembly where he finally held a speech. The ritual of entry was echoed in the cardinal's departure from Bergen at the end of summer, when William was accompanied with great pomp by the king and an impressive cortege of boats.⁴¹¹

406 HsH, Chs. 247–248.

407 HsH, Ch. 248.

408 *Kardínállinn sagði at hann vill konungs forsjá hlita* (HsH, Ch. 249).

409 HsH, Ch. 249. The episode is more thoroughly examined in Chapter 3, 7.1.4.

410 *sua mikinn skipa-fiólða a tek hefir eigi fét fleiri i einni hófn*. (HsH, Ch. 255).

411 HsH, Ch. 258.

The preparation of Håkon's coronation had been a show of strength for the aristocracy. When King Håkon arrived in Bergen in the spring before the coronation, he held a meeting to receive "the counsel of wise men how he should make ready beforehand what most was worthy."⁴¹² However, the saga material does not indicate any political encounters, neither prior to the ceremony nor after it, on the model of the *konungstekja*. In contrast to the Church, the aristocracy did not exploit the crowning to redefine its relationship to the king. The ceremony was not tinged with political competition, but instead was characterized by cooperation and collaboration.

The Ceremony

The crowning ceremony represented the culmination of the whole program. It was organized in the very center of Bergen in Holmen and included several locations: the royal palace and its courtyard, and Christ Church as the coronation church. The ceremony had an extremely important symbolic significance. It marked the transformation of the king into a sacred ruler invested by the grace of God. The ceremony was religious and followed a Christian liturgy. It was a public event which assembled both the local population and the elite at a specific location, which made the ceremony a powerful medium of communication for the kingship.

A royal coronation was an imported ritual which followed foreign *ordines* or practices. The source material tells us nothing about the origin of the *ordo* used in 1247 and we can learn only little from earlier celebrations. In his account of the coronation of 1163, Snorri dedicated more space to the banquet than to the "consecration."⁴¹³ The author of the *Sverris saga* was not interested in this issue either.⁴¹⁴ The coronation ceremony itself apparently was of little interest for Sturla, who summarized it in very few and laconic words: "the service went on in the proper form."⁴¹⁵ This service referred to a succession of rituals which varied in chronological order from region to region. These operations were, in random order: the anointing that transformed the king into the sacred vicar of God, the knighting, the conferring of the regalia (crowning) and the oaths. Based on several details in the text, P. Schramm assumed that the crowning's *ordo* was strongly inspired by the German imperial liturgy – a model which

⁴¹² *þa hugleiddi hann með vitra manna raði. huerfu hann skyldi vm bua sem sæmiligast.* (HsH, Ch. 249).

⁴¹³ ME, Ch. 22.

⁴¹⁴ II, 2.5.

⁴¹⁵ HsH, Ch. 254.

seems to have dominated all of Scandinavia and Western Europe – which started with the reception of royal insignia, the anointing and the oaths.⁴¹⁶ A new *ordo* also appeared in France in 1246, *Ordo ad consecrandum et coronandum regem*, which may also have been a source of inspiration.⁴¹⁷

The ceremony took place 29 July, St Olaf's Day, a highly symbolic date in view of the Norwegian kings' relation to the saint. The ceremony was largely addressed to an aristocratic audience. In view of the comprehensive list of *hófðingiar*, "chieftains," provided by the *Hákonar saga*, the size of Christ Church did not allow the commoners to attend the ceremony.⁴¹⁸ Besides the papal legate, who most probably officiated, there were the five bishops of the Norwegian provinces. The regular clergy was also represented with ten abbots, archdeacons and provosts, and "most of the canons of all the sees in the land."⁴¹⁹ In addition there were present the king's sons, the later King Hakon the Young and Magnus, Earl Knut and Sigurd Jónsson, as well as the king's liegemen. Sturla also names five lawmen, the king's marshals and sysselmenn and the entire *hirð*. Finally there were also "the best freemen out of every province" and "a crowd of outlandish men."⁴²⁰ While the total size of the audience is difficult to gauge with precision, the social origin of the attendees leaves no doubt as to its elitist character. The effective participation of the bishops and papal legate in the different rituals of anointing and crowning is also certain even though the saga remains silent on the subject. The active participation of the lay aristocracy during the coronation oath is not confirmed, but is plausible and likely if we consider Snorri's account of the 1163 coronation.

The ceremony centered on the king and displayed the different stages which transformed a mortal king into a sacred king exercising his rule as a God-given office.⁴²¹ Through the ceremony, the Church consolidated its position as institution invested with a divine task in everybody's sight. Yet, in receiving the grace of God, the king shared in the sanctity of the bishops and became their equal. To the aristocracy, however, the succession of rituals of the ceremony functioned as a visual and symbolic emancipation of the king from the aristocratic condition. At the end of the ceremony the king was no longer *primus*

416 Schramm, P.E. 1969. "Der 'Salische Kaiserordo' und Benzo von Alba. Ein neues Zeugnis des Graphia-Kreises," In P.E. Schramm, *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste* 3, 394–395. See also Hoffmann 1990, 126–129.

417 Le Goff 2001a.

418 *HsH*, Ch. 253.

419 *ok flestir kórsbræðr í landinu* (*HsH*, Ch. 253).

420 *hínir beztu bændr or hueriu fylki þar var ok fioldi vtlendra manna* (*HsH*, Ch. 253).

421 Le Goff 2001a; Woolley 1915; Schramm 1937.

inter pares, but invested with a divine grace which nobody in the nobility could pretend to. The ceremony of coronation was thus a powerful medium that displayed and affirmed royal supremacy over society.

While the central elements of the ceremony unfolded within the coronation church, the solemn processions which took place outside the church also played a crucial role. The procession from the king's yard to Christ Church is reported in great detail by Sturla. First there was a procession headed by the king's officers in their most beautiful attire: Eighty members of the royal retinue, walking two by two, preceded two banner-bearers, the king's stewards and sewers and the king's vassals "with drawn swords."⁴²² Then came the regalia that were to be solemnly presented to the king during the consecration: the consecration clothes, the two royal scepters of silver ornamented with a golden cross and an eagle respectively, the crown and the sword of consecration. They were carried in hierarchical order by members of the royal family and by high officeholders. First, three liegemen bore the king's consecration robes on a table top. They were followed by Sigurd the king's son and Munan Biskopsson, each carrying a royal scepter, and Håkon the Young, who bore the royal crown in his hands. Finally, the earl walked with the sword that would be used to consecrate King Håkon. A second cortege followed, composed of the king surrounded by ten bishops and the archbishop. This second group was met by a procession of clerics (bishops, abbots and clerks) coming from the church and singing *Ecce mitto angelum*. They led the king to Christ Church, where the archbishop and other bishops took the king to the altar. As mentioned above, the description of the ceremony within the church is reported only briefly. We know that a mass was held before and after the ritual of coronation. Then the newly anointed king returned to the royal palace accompanied by the same processions and corteges as when he came.⁴²³

Unlike the ceremony in Christ Church, the processions between the king's palace and the coronation church were important in displaying the kingship to a broader audience. As mentioned earlier, the distance between the two buildings was very short and offered limited opportunities for a great number of people to see the cortege. Still, this afforded the local population the unique spectacle of the king escorted by the lay and clerical elite of the kingdom, in their most splendid garments and accompanied by the chants and clamor of the crowd. The active participation of the lay aristocracy is also confirmed as a decisive element in the crown's public display. The *hirð* and the king's liegemen

⁴²² HsH, Ch. 254.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

backed up their lord's symbolic communication through their processional performance.

Coronation Banquet and Exaltation of Royal Supremacy

As stated above, King Håkon prepared his crowning with great energy. Most of this effort was dedicated to the organization of the festivities succeeding the coronation ceremony. Apparently, in his search for foreign goods and imported foods, King Håkon's major preoccupation was to prepare his festivities so as to meet European standards for royal celebrations and to display his power and prestige to the attendees. At courtly banquets there were strong distinctions between noble food and peasant food, which was proscribed from courtly tables. We do not know in detail what was served at the meals. Yet Sturla's kvads refer to wines and other exquisite liquors, "the metheglin's honeyed flood streamed down within the ribs of men."⁴²⁴ The dinner service also appears to have been luxurious, with "cups of gold" and "golden vessels."⁴²⁵

The location for the celebration was also prepared with great care, so as to offer the participants maximum comfort and to surround them with luxury. The festivities before and after the ceremony took place in the king's yard. Because of the bad weather, two wooden halls, previously built as boat sheds, were decorated with "the best materials" in order to house the feasts. On the walls were hung "dyed cloth and good quilts, with silk and velvet shot with gold."⁴²⁶ Similarly, coloured tents were hung in the courtyard and between the King's house and Christ Church, so as not to expose the guests to the rain.⁴²⁷

It was within this framework of magnificence modeled on the banquets of the most prestigious Western European principalities that King Håkon received his guests. This profusion of luxury and the abundance of rare commodities were used to display the king's generosity towards the clergy and the aristocracy and to exalt his prestige and power. He alone possessed the resources (both in terms of finance and networks) to organize festivities of this quality. As it has been stressed in earlier chapters on courtly culture, King Håkon Håkonsson developed a deliberate strategy to position himself as a central agent in the transfer of aristocratic culture. Through an active policy of literary patronage, he strove to become the most important purveyor of European

⁴²⁴ *en hunángsbára í geðknör glymjandi fell* (HsH, Ch. 255).

⁴²⁵ HsH, Ch. 255.

⁴²⁶ *hufit var allt tialdat steindum klæðum með goðum kulltum með filki ok þellum gullfkotnum* (HsH, Ch. 254).

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

courtly fashion and manners at his court. The celebrations of his coronation functioned as a practical demonstration of the king's role as mediator of culture.

Most courtly courtesy books emphasized the importance of seating arrangements, the organization of meals, luxury food, and of decoration and manner of serving. From a courtly point of view, these elements played a greater role in the festivities than the simple pleasure of food. The ceremonial serving of courses was organized to enhance royal pre-eminence and seems to have followed the protocol of courtly banquets. It was carried out by the highest-ranking nobles in attendance: The king's *lendmenn* bore the first dish, while Håkon the Young, his brother Sigurd, Earl Knut, and Munan were the cup-bearers for the king and his immediate guests.⁴²⁸ Such honorable service, suitable for the most exceptional banquets – royal and imperial – is a testament to the Norwegian king's stewards' close familiarity with the courtly table manners and meal organization that were the rule at European courts. Seating arrangements were organized spatially around the king and enhanced his supremacy. The saga gives us a great deal of information about the seating arrangements at the banquet. King Håkon the Old sat on a high seat in the middle of one of the sides of the table, facing the whole audience. Around him sat the most prominent guests in decreasing order of rank. On his right-hand side, the place of privilege, were the cardinal, the archbishop and the bishops. On his left sat women – a new indication of the protocol's courtly origins: the queen, her mother, the king's daughters and so on. Another high seat was installed in mid-hall for the king's three sons: Håkon the Young, Earl Knut and Sigurd. The rest of the company was arranged around the hall; on the west wall sat “abbots, friars, provosts, and other learned clerks,” on the south wall were “the members of the royal retinue.”⁴²⁹ As mentioned in the saga and illustrated by Fischer's drawing (see figure 2), the king faced 13 rows of tables with guests. The effect was that the whole assembly faced the table of the king throughout the entire celebration.

The most important element in the display of the king's new authority and legitimacy during the festivities was the regalia he had received during the coronation ceremony. The saga provides valuable, albeit imprecise, information about the physical appearance of King Håkon during the celebrations after his coronation. It says that once Håkon left the coronation church and reached for his palace, “the king put off his coronation robes, and put on other

428 *HsH*, Ch. 254.

429 *HsH*, Ch. 254.

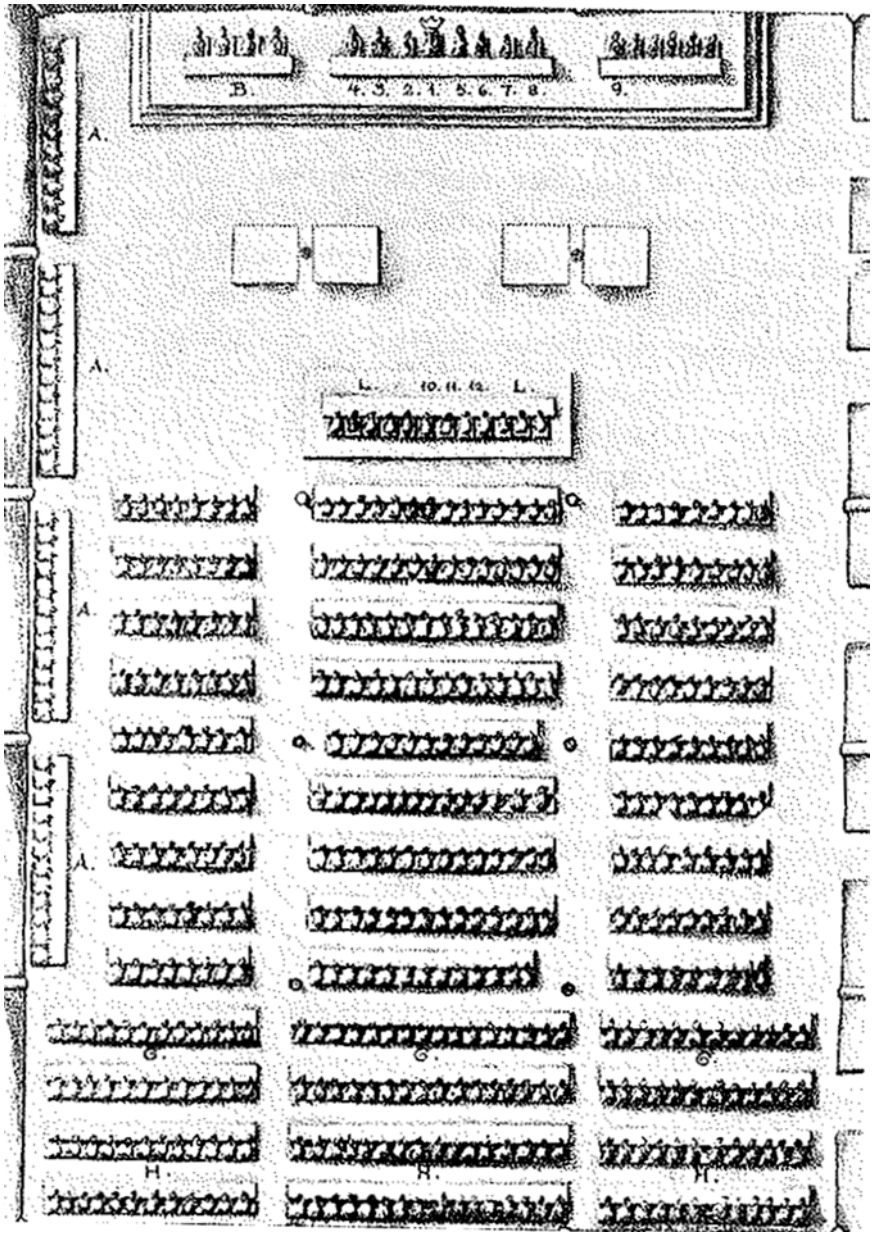


FIGURE 2 *Reconstruction by G. Fischer of the seating arrangement under the banquet in Bergen 1247*

respectable equipment [*annan búnað sæmiligan*], and bore the crown that day."⁴³⁰ The most remarkable element is the fact that the king wore the crown during at least the first day of the celebrations. The crown was the highest symbol of the king's divine legitimacy and its presence during the whole time of the celebrations was used not only to act as an expression and reminder of his new authority and power, but as a means of realizing them over his subjects. With the image of the coronation and anointment still fresh in the mind of the reception's attendees, the view of the crowned king could not but subjugate the audience.

Striking While the Iron is Hot

Beyond contributing to the glorification of the sovereign over time, this whole operation of symbolic communication first and foremost aimed at achieving more or less immediate results. The presence of the most prominent men of the kingdom's lay and ecclesiastic elite, combined with the image of the king whose symbolic aura was at its zenith, was an excellent opportunity to achieve political results for his domestic and foreign ambitions.

Ever since his accession to royal power, King Håkon had strived to control Iceland. The consolidation of his authority after Skule's death in 1240 boosted this ambition.⁴³¹ The presence of the papal legate was crucial for Håkon's crowning, but was also valuable for the king's foreign policies. His voice was that of Rome and as such weighed greatly even in the most remote parts of Christianity. This was indeed the case for Håkon's imperialistic policy in the North Atlantic. Shortly after the coronation festivities, Cardinal William consecrated the new Bishop of Hólar in Iceland. According to the saga, the consecration was accompanied by the Cardinal's advice to the Icelanders to submit to the Norwegian king: "For he called it unfair that that land should not be subject to some king like all others in the world."⁴³² The new bishop did not come alone. At his side was the king's representative, the Icelander Tord Kakali. Similarly, William entrusted Olav, Bishop of Greenland and present at the ceremony, with the task of making the Greenlanders accept Håkon's rule.⁴³³ The kingship and the Church thus made common cause for the consolidation of

430 *Hèreptir afklæddist konúngur vígsluklæðum, ok fór í annan búnað sæmiligan, ok bar korónu þann dag.* (HsH, Ch. 254).

431 Brégaint 2013, 439–466; Wærdahl 2011, 69–118.

432 *kallaði þat úsannligt, at þat land þjónaði eigi undir einnhvern konúng, sem öll önnur í veröldinni* (HsH, Ch. 257).

433 HsH, Ch. 257.

royal power in Iceland and in Greenland. The crowning, in bringing a papal legate together with several of the most important individuals from the lay and clerical elite, but also from the different corners of the Norwegian realm, constituted the perfect opportunity for the king to affirm his legitimate authority over every part of the Norwegian kingdom. Backed with the full strength of the display of power which characterized the festivities and the coronation ceremony, the king was able to enforce his ambitions for greater control in Iceland and Greenland. We can assume that many Icelanders and Greenlanders attended the festivities. The saga lists two Icelanders, Tord Kakali and Gizurr Þorvaldsson, who were members of the royal retinue. This same retinue as a whole attended the entire celebration and counted many other Icelanders among its ranks.

According to the *Hákonar saga*, in the days succeeding the coronation ceremony, the papal legate held meetings in which he received complaints and pronounced decisions. Among them was one of major consequence for royal communication: Cardinal William of Sabina “forbade ordeals, and said it did not beseem Christian men to put God to an oath to bear witness in the affairs of men.”⁴³⁴ The interdiction of trials by ordeal in Western Europe was the result of the Church’s growing skepticism and even aversion throughout the 11th and 12th centuries.⁴³⁵ Contemporary critics pointed to the lack of scriptural foundation and to the fact that it clashed with the reformist principles preached by Rome of detaching clerics from lay affairs. Moreover, in the late 12th century, the papacy engaged in a programme of procedural law reform, which paved the way for new procedures based on investigation and the abandoning of *iudicium Dei*.⁴³⁶ Canon 18 of Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 started to ban any direct involvement of clerics in ordeals: “Nor may anyone confer a rite of blessing or consecration on a purgation by ordeal of boiling or cold water or of the red-hot iron.”⁴³⁷ Twenty years later, Rome took a decisive step when Pope Gregory IX in 1234 put down in his Decretals the prohibition for clerics to interfere in lay affairs, which *de facto* forbade clerical supervision of ordeals.⁴³⁸

434 *Þýrriþauð jarnburð fagði at þat bar ecki kriftnum monnum at særa guð til nóckurs vitniþburðar* (HsH, Ch. 255).

435 Bartlett 1986, 70–102.

436 Finbarr McAuley. 2006. “Canon Law and the End of the Ordeal” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3: 473–513; John W. Baldwin. 1961. “The Intellectual Preparation for the Canon of 1215 against Ordeals.” *Speculum*, Vol. 36: 613–636.

437 *Nec quisquam purgation aquae ferventis vel frigidae seu ferri candentis ritum cuiuslibet benedictionis aut consecrationis impendat* (*Concilium Lateranense* IV, Canon 18).

438 “Clerks and monks should not be involved in secular affairs” (*Decretals*, Book III, Titulus 50).

The main motivation for the prohibition of ordeals is thus found in the development of new legal procedures in the 13th century. As we have previously seen, ordeals by fire placed the power to decide the legitimacy or the illegitimacy of the claims of royal candidates in the hands of the Norwegian clergy. While the abolition decision of 1247 was in keeping with a larger prohibition movement in Western Europe, it had major political and communicational consequences for the Church and the crown. In view of this, it seems necessary to examine the circumstances under which the ordeal was abandoned in Norway and more particularly the involvement of the kingship.

This concerns firstly the timing of the interdiction. In practice, there were great disparities in when the interdiction was applied locally. It was abandoned in England as early as 1219. Scotland formally abolished ordeals in 1230 and the Holy German Empire in 1231.⁴³⁹ Aragon forbade ordeals the same year as Norway, 1247.⁴⁴⁰ The ritual had still its supporters, however. Closer to Norway in Denmark, Anders Sunesen (1201–1222), Archbishop of Lund, still strongly defended the use of the ordeal by hot iron in his *Antiquae leges Scaniae*.⁴⁴¹

In Norway, the interdiction was only decided in the wake of King Håkon's crowning in 1247 with the coming of William of Sabina. Thus nearly thirty years elapsed between the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and the legate's words in 1247. Was the voice of Rome never heard in Norway? Can we doubt the Norwegian Church's will to oppose ordeals? On the one hand, we have few, but clear instances of local prelates who had no scruples to use it for their aims. On the other hand we do not know what Archbishops Tore I (1206–1214), Peter (1225–1226), Tore II (1227–1230) and Sigurd Eindridesson (1231–1252) thought about ordeals, but we do know that there was a strong and ancient aversion to ordeals in the Norwegian Church. Yet if some parts of the Church had desired the abolition of the ritual, there would have been numerous occasions for the Norwegian clergy to enforce its demise. If we except the synod of the summer of 1218, at which the archbishop demanded what was to be the last ordeal, six different major meetings organized by the archbishop and several bishops potentially provided ideal opportunities for such an announcement: 1223, 1226,

439 P.T. Leeson. 2012. "Ordeals." *Journal of Law and Economics*, Vol. 55 August: 710; Bartlett 1986, 76.

440 Bisson 1991, 75–76; Gijon 1961, 45; E.M. Meljers. 1947. "Los Fueros de Huesca y Sobrarbe." *AHDE*, 18: 35–60.

441 R.C. Van Caenegem. 1991. *Legal History: A European Perspective*. The Hambledon Press: 87–88.

1233, 1236 (Bergen) and 1237, 1240 (Nidaros).⁴⁴² Obviously, if the Norwegian clergy had been willing to act against ordeals before that date, they did not take the chance. We could of course argue that from 1218 onwards there are no instances of ordeals to prove royal birth. In practice, the interdiction may thus have been effective at an earlier stage. These considerations suggest that the local clergy did not play any decisive role in the abolition of ordeals by fire. It also points to the importance of the context of 1247 and in particular to the roles of King Håkon and Cardinal William of Sabina.

In practice it was not unusual that kings and secular princes actively pronounced the interdiction in their kingdoms.⁴⁴³ For instance, it was the King of Denmark, Valdemar II, who forbade the ordeal by hot iron in 1216 in his kingdom, only a year after the council.⁴⁴⁴ King Henry III of England abolished ordeals in 1217. In France, while the ordeals by fire and water were already forbidden under the influence of the Truce of God from the 11th century onwards, King Louis IX definitively banned all types of ordeal with his edict of 1258.⁴⁴⁵ The interdiction in the Holy German Empire was the doing of Frederick II, and in Aragon it was the work of King James I.

However, the *Hákonar saga* blurs the responsibility for the prohibition. On the one hand the saga speaks of the abolition as one of many “ordinances made by the Cardinal” that were made by the legate during the celebrations that followed the crowning.⁴⁴⁶ However, according to the saga, these decisions were the result of daily discussions, which unfolded after the crowning between “the king and the cardinal and liegemen [who] spoke of the business of the land, and of learned clerks and holy churches.”⁴⁴⁷

For Helle however, the king certainly exerted some influence over the ecclesiastic statutes made by the legate in 1247.⁴⁴⁸ It is P.A. Munch who most explicitly interpreted the abolition of ordeals in Norway in connection with the consolidation of royal succession through dynastic principles.

442 Helle 1972, 135–144.

443 For his part, Leeson argues that ordeals definitively ceased to be used in practice only when priests refused to participate in their engineering. Lesson 2012, 691–714.

444 *DD*, nr 96: 137–143.

445 Jean Gaudemet. 1965. “Les ordalies au Moyen Âge: doctrine, législation et pratique canonique.” *Recueil de la Société Jean-Bodin, XVIIe siècle av. J.-C.: la preuve 2*, Bruxelles: 99–135.

446 *HsH*, Ch. 255.

447 *konungr ok kardinali ok ræddo vm nauðfyniar landzhínf ok lærða manna ok heilagra kirkna* (*HsH*, Ch. 255).

448 Helle 1972, 146, 281.

Jærnbyrdens Afskaffelse i Forening med Kongens Kroning og Legitimation, saavel som det Princip med Hensyn til Tronarvefølgen, hvilket Kongen, ved at bestemme sin ældste egtefødde Søn til sin Tronfølger, med Udelukkelse af den ældre, uegtefødde, praktisk erklærede gjeldende⁴⁴⁹

There is little doubt that Norwegian kings wished for the disappearance of the ritual. In 1217 King Håkon had already expressed clear disapproval when he was asked to prove his royal birth and called it “hard terms.”⁴⁵⁰ Moreover, King Håkon certainly remembered his own dramatic experience of his mother being submitted to the test of red-hot iron. Yet, although the *Håkonar saga* praises King Håkon for his activity in pronouncing laws, and in particular for having put an end to several brutal customs, he is not attributed with the interdiction of ordeals.⁴⁵¹

The advantages of the abolition of trial by ordeal in the context of royal succession were great in terms of political communication. The disappearance of ordeals from the ritualistic landscape of kingship deprived possible candidates of a means to challenge the authority of King Håkon and his successors. More importantly, the abolition affected the dynasty’s most powerful challenger in the 13th century: the Church. Although the Norwegian clergy never took up arms against the kings, given the encroachments upon clerical jurisdiction and the overall rise of royal authority in society, the Church constituted the crown’s most credible opponent. As we have seen, the ritual placed the legitimacy of the king’s claims in the hands of the clergy. It also provided the bishops with opportunities to bargain with a candidate for their support and sometimes their decisive intervention in the judgment. The abolition of ordeals by fire thus removed a ritual from the hand of potential opponents to the dynasty.

The Crowning of King Magnus the Lawmender 1261

The next crowning in the 13th century was arranged on the occasion of King Magnus’s marriage with the Danish princess Ingeborg in 1261.⁴⁵² Judging from Sturla’s words, the marriage of Magnus and the Danish princess Ingeborg was

449 “The abolition of Ordeals in connection with the king’s crowning and legitimation, as well the principle regarding royal succession, which the king declared in force by ordaining his eldest legitimately-born son as his royal successor, thereby eliminating of the older practice involving illegitimate [heirs]” (Author’s translation) (Munch 1858 I-4-1, 34).

450 *mikill afar-koftr* (*HsH*, Ch. 41).

451 *HsH*, Ch. 332.

452 *HsH*, Ch. 309.

a formidable display of royal majesty and splendor. We do not know where exactly the wedding ceremony was held and how it was organized. Sturla mentions however that “the princess was espoused to the king with great honour.”⁴⁵³ Again, the description of the festivities takes up more space in Sturla’s account. Like for the coronation banquet of 1247, the most prominent men and women of the lay and clerical elite were present. In addition, a crowd including townsmen and foreigners was invited to the king’s yard. According to the saga’s author, “there were no fewer than 1,600” guests at the banquet.⁴⁵⁴ It appears that the banquet was exceptionally luxurious. In particular, beverages like wine were served in abundance; quite a feat so far north and accordingly a sign of the king’s wealth and power.

In contrast to 1247, the crowning of King Magnus was not an occasion for the clergy to negotiate new rights. The context did not lend itself to negotiations. The crowning of Magnus was no transition of power, but only the association of the royal heir with the royal office during the king’s lifetime. King Håkon was still the ruling king and decisions taken under his rule were still valid as long as he lived. Moreover, the decision to arrange the wedding ceremony and *a fortiori* the crowning of the king and queen had been a quick one and did not leave the clergy time to organize a national assembly or discuss the decision to crown Magnus. The saga thus devotes only little space to the clergy in the whole event. Only the voice of Peter, Bishop of Bergen, is heard campaigning for the coronation.

Magnus was crowned in Bergen on 14 September 1261. Only a week separated the coronation from the wedding, so we can assume that no special preparation was needed and that the organization of the wedding was simply extended to include the coronation. Every step, from the cortege to the church to the procession back to the king’s yard, was an exact copy of the ceremony held in 1247. As before, the coronation ceremony is only briefly described: “the kings were led to the altar. After that mass was sung, and the consecration went as is ordained by holy church.”⁴⁵⁵ However, we gain some more precise information on the coronation staging through Sturla’s account of a Scottish witness to the ceremony, confirming that the bishops gave the king his coronation sword and that Magnus was led to his throne by the archbishop.⁴⁵⁶

453 *Ibid.*

454 *Ibid.*

455 *þa kongarner leiddir til alltariff. Efter þetta uar meffa jungin ok for uixla fram efter þui fem bydr j heilagri kirkju. (HsH, Ch. 310).*

456 *HsH, Ch. 309.*

The ritual banquet that followed is not reported in detail, but we can assume that it also was comparable to that of Håkon's coronation. A decisive similarity however was that the newly crowned king wore his royal robes and crown during the banquet and the following festivities.⁴⁵⁷

Again, as in 1247, major internal and foreign political issues were discussed in connection with the festivities. The first important issue was discussed during the wedding feast and not during the coronation ceremony because it concerned the crowning of the king's son, Magnus. With the unexpected death of his elder son Håkon the Young in 1257, royal succession was no longer secure. Håkon the Young had been hailed king at the thing of *Eyrapping* in Nidaros on 1 April 1240. Magnus had been hailed king at the *Eyrapping* in connection with his brother's death in 1257.⁴⁵⁸ During the marriage celebrations, the issue of presuccession was debated. Håkon was hesitant and asked for the advice of his councilors.⁴⁵⁹ Apparently, the issue of co-regency frightened many. While Håkon the Young had been hailed king, he had not been crowned, and remained thereby in a position subordinate to his father. Once crowned, Magnus would equal his father in honor. To some, this constituted a potential threat to peace. The specter of joint rule and division of the realm was still a burning issue twenty years after Earl Skule's death. As late as in 1255, Archbishop Einar proposed that the king share the realm between his sons.⁴⁶⁰ The author of the *Konungs Skuggsía* from the mid-1250s, in a vivid account depicting a realm stricken with moral dearth, warns against the sharing of the kingship between petty kings, which would only bring chaos and misery.⁴⁶¹ We know to whom the *Konungs Skuggsía* was addressed, and in this case the demand for loyalty was directed at the lay and clerical elite and courtiers in particular: a group who could contest sole rulership and give their loyalty to other princes. If King Håkon had been hesitant before, with the support of Bishop Peter of Bergen he accepted to grant his son "the greatest honour" of being crowned. In doing so, the king gave his heir a decisive advantage over eventual competing claimants and secured dynastic succession.

The operation however was a clever stratagem which aimed to unveil the loyalty and the faithfulness of some elements within the king's circle of friends and councilors, that is, the *hirð*. The manœuvre was revealed during

457 *HsH*, Ch. 310.

458 *HsH*, Ch. 292.

459 *HsH*, Ch. 309.

460 *HsH*, Ch. 284.

461 *Kgs*, Ch. xxxvi.

the coronation ceremony in the church when King Håkon addressed an oration to his new crowned son.⁴⁶² King Håkon first assured the newly-crowned king that his coronation was something he had strongly desired. He then explains to Magnus that the reason he sought counsel was to “know what other men had to say; and they were the same who egged me on, and were against granting it, who did not do their best to men matters between me and some of your kindred of old.”⁴⁶³ These words reveal that some elements within his circle of familiars attempted to sow the seeds of dissent between the king and his heir, arguing against Magnus’s crowning and probably casting doubt on his loyalty to his father.

Although we do not have explicit references to debates about these foreign political issues, King Magnus’s coronation occurred in a context of great political and military upheaval around the North Sea. It is my contention that the celebration of 1261 provided the ideal conditions, in terms of audience and the symbolic power newly acquired by the king, to realize royal ambition.

Like in 1247, the situation in the tributary regions of the Norwegian realm most probably was topical during the meetings. Thus Magnus’s crowning in 1261 must be seen in connection with the competition between Scotland and Norway for control of the Hebrides.⁴⁶⁴ Earlier in the year, two messengers from the Scottish king Alexander III, had arrived in Bergen to meet the king.⁴⁶⁵ The purpose of their visit remains uncertain, but Scotland’s ambitions for the Hebrides were no mystery.⁴⁶⁶ The messengers most probably came to press the king to sell the islands to the King of Scotland, as had been urged before in 1244 and 1248.⁴⁶⁷ The topic must have been discussed by the king and his counselors during the festivities. The king’s reaction to the envoys marked a breach in the diplomatic relations with Scotland. The emissaries were forced to stay with the king and were not allowed to return to their homeland.⁴⁶⁸ In 1262, the news of Scottish raids on the Hebrides forced King Håkon to call the levy.⁴⁶⁹ The rapidity of military mobilization against Scotland in 1263 may be explained by the

462 *HsH*, Ch. 310.

463 *Enn þui leitadi eg hier radfum ath eg uillda uita hier um anara manna til-laugr ok uoru þeir hiner faumu er mig eggiudu ok lauttu þeffa. ok ei hafa uerit umbota-menn med mior ok hinum fyrum audrum frænddum (Ibid.).*

464 *HsH*, Chs. 317–328.

465 *HsH*, Ch. 307.

466 Thomson 2008, 138–147.

467 *HsH*, Chs. 245 and 265.

468 *HsH*, Ch. 307.

469 *HsH*, Chs. 314 and 315.

fact that the eventuality of a raid to counter Scottish aggression had been debated earlier – why not during the celebrations of 1261? One of the emissaries, called Missel, was invited to attend the coronation ceremony in the church. Sturla makes a great deal of Missel's reaction to the grandeur and splendour of the coronation: "he was so struck at the ceremony that he sobbed before those who stood by told him what it all meant."⁴⁷⁰ The presence of the knight at the ceremony and the account of his impressions may reveal the king's intention to use the majesty of the ceremony to impress the envoys, who thereafter could go back to their lord and testify to Håkon's power.

The last major issue which was probably discussed over the course of the festivities also concerned the Atlantic islands. As we saw, the crowning of 1247 had marked the official beginning to the program of annexation of Iceland. After that day, several representatives had been sent by the king to these regions, entrusted with the task of persuading them to pay taxes and swear allegiance to the king of Norway: Tord Kakali in 1247,⁴⁷¹ the Earls Þorgils Skarði, Finnbjörn Helgason⁴⁷² and Gizurr Þorvaldsson⁴⁷³ in the mid-1250s. In 1260, the issue of Iceland flared up again. Hearing of his last envoys' inefficacy, King Håkon changed his strategy. In the summer of 1261 King Håkon sent a new emissary to Iceland, Hallvard Gullsko, to again speak for the cause of the king and in particular to make an alliance with Gizurr's competitor, Ravn Oddsson.⁴⁷⁴ This move was decisive. In 1262, Icelanders started to give signs of submission. We do not know the exact date of Håkon's decision. However, the complete reversal of the king's alliance policy must have been thoroughly discussed with the king's most prominent counselors and vassals. Again, the festivities surrounding Magnus's coronation would have provided King Håkon with a favorable opportunity to take up the political situation in Iceland and enforce new policies

The Crowning of Eirik Magnusson 1280

The crowning of Magnus the Lawmender was the last ceremony which we have a narrative about. The crowning of his heir, King Eirik Magnusson, is only alluded to in some charters, and we do not know much about the staging of the ceremony and the pre- and post-festivities.⁴⁷⁵ The author of the contemporary

⁴⁷⁰ *HsH*, Ch. 310.

⁴⁷¹ *HsH*, Ch. 257. *Sts*, II, 92.

⁴⁷² *HsH*, Chs. 273, 276.

⁴⁷³ *HsH*, Ch. 297.

⁴⁷⁴ *HsH*, Ch. 311.

⁴⁷⁵ *DN* III, nr.21; *DN* XVII nr. 880; *DN* I nr.69; *DN* XIX nr.302; *NgL* III, 3–12.

Biskupa sögur refers to it, but simply rejoices over the event without going into detail.⁴⁷⁶ We do know however that Eirik was crowned in Christ Church on 2 July 1280 and that the ceremony was accompanied by two other major meetings: a synod which gathered all the bishops from the ecclesiastical province (16 June–29 July), and a meeting of the barons held at some point after the coronation. Despite the absence of detail, the coronation of 1280 is of particular interest as it strikingly exemplifies the ceremony's threefold structure as means for communication. In this specific context, it illustrates the use of a royal consecration by the Church and the aristocracy to promote their interests.

Eirik was only aged twelve and Håkon ten when their father died in May 1280. A collegium of barons and prominent officials was formed to rule as regent until Eirik reached the age of majority.⁴⁷⁷ Eirik had been previously elected king at the *Eyrapping* on 2 July 1275.⁴⁷⁸ While King Magnus's death occurred before the coronation of his son, it is clear that the king wished to crown his heir during his lifetime in order to secure dynastic succession. Helle has argued that the ceremony was planned as early as summer 1278, when the archbishop summoned his clergy to a synod in the summer of 1280.⁴⁷⁹ The only source referring to the ceremony is to be found in a letter dated 6 May 1280, three days before Magnus's death. The letter is from King Magnus to the English king, Edward I, and states that Magnus is preparing the coronation of his older son, *primogenitum nostrum*, Eirik, on the feast day of St John the Baptist in Bergen.⁴⁸⁰

Eirik's coronation was to take place while the candidate was a minor, which in itself was not remarkable. More decisive were the absence of a ruling king and the regency of the barons. These two elements made Eirik's coronation the scene of a violent exchange between the Church and the barons, who each attempted to exploit the ceremony for their respective aims.

The source of the coronation's political exploitation lies in the latent conflict between Archbishop Jon and the barons about the concordat of 1277. The 1270s had witnessed major negotiations between King Magnus and his archbishop about the rights and privileges of the Norwegian Church. After a failed project in 1273, Magnus and Jon finally came to an agreement in 1277 in Tønsberg. In the barons' view however, the concordat was much too favorable

476 Bs, I 707.

477 Helle 1964, 177.

478 MH.

479 Helle 1964, 171.

480 DN XIX, nr. 302.

to the Church.⁴⁸¹ Eirik's coronation provided an opportunity for the Church to secure its gains and for the barons to impose their ideas.

Like in 1163 and 1194, the ceremony was held in connection with a provincial council (16 June – 29 July). Most of the episcopal sees were represented by their bishops at the meeting. The written sources also refer to many other clerics.⁴⁸² We do not know exactly which issues were raised at the council, but there is little doubt that the clergy debated how to consolidate its newly acquired privileges against aristocratic opposition. In the preparation phase, the coronation oath was again central. As before, the clergy exploited its monopoly over the ceremony to obtain a promise from the young Eirik and the Barons to swear a coronation oath that confirmed the concordat of 1277.⁴⁸³ It is evident from Jon's statements that parallel to the synod, the barons also held meetings where they discussed a strategy to invalidate the concordat.⁴⁸⁴ Obviously the archbishop first obtained the Barons' agreement on the oath and the ceremony of coronation could proceed. During the ceremony, King Eirik received the crown from the hands of Archbishop Jon and swore to guarantee his father's earlier concessions to the Church and, in reference to the Barons' maneuver in June, to fight against laws that aimed at depriving the Church of its rights.⁴⁸⁵

So far everything had gone Jon's way. The whole assembly in Christ Church had witnessed the Church's triumph. However, once the coronation had been performed the archbishop's political and symbolic position was seriously weakened. The Church had nothing more to bargain with and the king was now crowned and anointed. The last phase of the coronation was to involve the barons. Aware of the dangers, Archbishop Jon actively worked on keeping alive the memory of the crowning to still benefit from its symbolic advantage. Three weeks after the ceremony, Archbishop Jon commanded a written copy of the coronation oath to be produced. The document was a proof of the king's promise that could be used against the Barons' attacks.⁴⁸⁶ It is interesting, too, to note that in the *arenga* the document lays great emphasis on the circumstances during which the oath was sworn: in the presence of Archbishop Jon,

481 Eldbjørg Haug, 2003. "Konkordat – konflikt – privilegium. Sættergjerden som indikator på forholdet stat-kirke fra Magnus Lagabøter til Christian I (1277–1458)." In Imsen 2003: 83–118.

482 *DN* I nr.69, *NgL* III, 229.

483 *DN* I, nr. 69.

484 *NgL* III, 3–12.

485 Helle 1964, 178–179.

486 *DN* I nr. 69.

“by the grace of God who during his crowning sat the crown upon his head.”⁴⁸⁷ This precision was not without design, but clearly reminded of the chief role played by the archbishop in the making of the king. Moreover, the Norwegian clergy, who were still sitting *in concillium* until 29 July, issued a document known as the Statute of Archbishop Jon, which threatened harsh punishment and excommunication to whoever would contest the concessions of the concordat of 1277.⁴⁸⁸

As mentioned above, the barons had met throughout the summer to work out a counter-document that was meant to undermine the concordat's legal basis.⁴⁸⁹ In the weeks following the crowning, now freed from their dependence on the archbishop's good will, the barons broke their promises. They issued an amendment which condemned the privileges granted by King Magnus the Lawmender on the grounds that “some dispositions seemed not to respond to the people's needs.”⁴⁹⁰ The barons' anticlerical program was dressed up in royal clothing. First, the text was meant to be integrated into King Magnus's National Law (1274) as an amendment. Second, the stipulations were written in Eirik's name. The *intitulatio* reproduces the royal title, now complete with the devotional formula:

*Eirkr Magnus með guðs miskunn Noregs konongr son Magnus konongs*⁴⁹¹
[By the grace of God Eirik Magnus King of Norway and son of King Magnus]

The barons thus also drew on the newly performed coronation and on its prestige to enforce a revision of Magnus's laws. The amendment greatly sharpened the conflict; to the extent that archbishop was forced to escape into exile in Sweden in 1282.⁴⁹²

Royal Burials

As we have seen, crowning ceremonies functioned as arenas for royal communication and propaganda. Two other rituals closely involved kings and served royal ambition. The first is the royal funeral, which marked the transition of

487 *Dei gratia* [...] *Nidrosiensi archiepiscopo qui eum coronando in regem coronam capiti eius inposuit* (DN I nr. 69).

488 *NgL*, III, 231–232.

489 *NgL*, III, 3–4. See Haug 2003, 98–99.

490 *synizt i sumum stoðum gera eigi sua liosan orskurð sem menn þurfa* (*NgL*, III, nr. 1) (Author's translation).

491 *NgL*, III, nr. 1.

492 Helle 1964, 179.

sovereigns and furnished the Norwegian kingship with an opportunity to display dynastic continuity. Second, we will examine the ritual connected with the king's arrival in towns: Solemn Entries. This ritual was once again an occasion for political dialogue between the kingship and the clergy.

Håkon Håkonsson's Funerals: Displaying Dynastic Continuity

For practical reasons, royal funerals could hardly follow the three-step structure sketched above. The frequent combination of sudden death and unsatisfactory conservation techniques compelled those in charge of the royal body to bury it quickly and in the closest appropriate place available. These contingencies often came at the cost of complex ceremonies and rituals and of political exploitation through ritualistic display. In particular, the phase of preparation was often very short, if it existed at all. Finally, they also obstructed the establishment of a royal necropolis. When the nearest ecclesiastic institution had been chosen to welcome the corpse of a king, it needed a strong political will to transfer the body to a more final burial place.⁴⁹³

Despite these contingencies, Western European kingships strove to arrange royal funerals as a grand display of royal power and to establish dynastic burials.⁴⁹⁴ Royal funerals were public events that attracted a broad audience and provided perfect conditions to exalt the defunct king and his heir to the throne. Although these rituals were religious and headed by the clergy, the kingship was closely involved. As we saw under King Sverre, funerals could be turned into instruments of royal propaganda through public orations (see II, 2). Erlande-Brandenburg has even shown how some princes interfered majorly in the staging of the funerals: in the processions that accompanied the corpse to the church, during its public exposition and the religious ceremony in the church.⁴⁹⁵ In the following pages we will examine the funerals of King Håkon Håkonsson in 1264 – the sole episode reported in our sources, to explore how the Norwegian king worked out the celebration of the dynasty.

13th century Norwegian royal funerals have not been the subject of detailed study to date. The pioneering work of Nicolaysen limits itself to registering factual information about the burial of medieval kings.⁴⁹⁶ It must be said that

493 See the comments of Alain Erlande-Brandenburg about these practical considerations for royal funerals in medieval France, Erlande-Brandenburg 1975, 19–22.

494 *Ibid.*, 5–48; Ralph E. Giesey. 1960. *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France*. Librairie Droz.

495 *Ibid.*, 12–16.

496 Nicolai, Nicolaysen. 1870. *Om De Kongelige Begravelser i Norge Efter Hedendommen*, Kristiania, P.T. Mallings bogtrykkeri.

the narratives of royal burials constitute rather ungrateful material. Thus the death and the funerals of King Håkon Sverresson are laconically reported in terms such as “he breathed his last the eighth day of Yule” or “he was buried in Christ church [Bergen].”⁴⁹⁷ Neither did later kings get a better treatment. King Guttorm also “breathed his last at Nidaros.”⁴⁹⁸ Earl Håkon “died and his funeral was worthily done.”⁴⁹⁹ King Inge simply “died.”⁵⁰⁰ Finally, the funeral of King Håkon the Young, who died in Tønsberg in 1257, are reported with few words: “The body of king Håkon was borne in to Oslo, and he was buried in St-Halvard’s church, where king Sigurd Magnusson was buried.”⁵⁰¹

These succinct descriptions of royal and princely burials contrast sharply with the narrative of Håkon Håkonsson’s funerals in the *Hákonar saga*. The account takes up several pages and depicts in great detail the king’s burial in St Magnus’ Cathedral on the Orkneys in December 1263, his translation to Bergen early in 1264, and finally the new burial in Bergen on 24 March.⁵⁰²

After a long illness, King Håkon Håkonsson died on 17 December 1263 in Kirkwall on the Orkneys. The body was washed and shaved. It is also mentioned that the body was shown “all the care that beseemed so noble a king.” The account then tells that,

On Sunday the body was borne up into the upper hall. There was ready a bier with splendid furniture. The body was clad in noble robes and garland set on his head. [...] the body was laid on a bier. Then all the bishops and priests who were then in the house and all the king’s henchmen went thither. Then the candle-swains held torches, and then it was light all over the hall. Then the folk came in to see the body..⁵⁰³

The body of the dead king was thus exhibited in public and great care was taken to present it with splendid clothes and garments, probably to compensate for

497 *hann andaðiz otta dag Jola d. Jola* (HsH, Ch. 1) hann var jarðaðr í Kristskirkju (Bs, Ch. 6).

498 *þat fama fumar andaðiz Guthormr konungr þar j niðar-osi.* (HsH, Ch. 2).

499 *Jarlinn andaðist, ok var ger virðulig útleiðsla hans.* (HsH, Ch. 8).

500 *Enn litlu sýddar anndaðist Jnngi kongur* (HsH, Ch. 11).

501 *Lik hakonar kongf uar fært inn til ofloar ok uar hann iardadur j hallvardzkirkiv þar fem figurdur kongr íorfala-fari uar grafenn.* (HsH, Ch. 288).

502 HsH, Ch. 329–331.

503 *Sunnudaginn var lík konúngs borit upp í lopthöllina, ok sett á barar. Líkit var klætt tignarklæðum ok sett garland á höfuð honum, ok búit at öllu um, sem vera átti um kórónaðan konúng. Stóðu kertisevinnar með kertum, ok var ljóst of alla höllina. Þa gekk til fólkit, at sjá líkit* (HsH, Ch. 330).

the absence of regalia. The set-up was also elaborate, with torches illuminating the room and a public mass held. The king's face was uncovered and in many respects the setting corresponded to royal funeral practices in the great contemporary monarchies. The corpse was then laid in a coffin and buried in the most holy place in Magnus's Cathedral, under the choir and the shrine that contained the relics of St Magnus. A feast was organized where the king's men received presents.

The burial of King Håkon in Orkney was only meant to be temporary. The king had given clear indications that he should be buried in Bergen.⁵⁰⁴ Håkon's wish provided the opportunity for a ceremonial dedicated to the glorification of dynasty. Thus on 5 March the body was disinterred and put on a ship. It took two weeks for the ship to reach Bergen.⁵⁰⁵

The saga makes clear that the announcement of Håkon's death came late. When the fleet that carried the body of King Håkon reached the Norwegian coast, messengers with letters were immediately sent to Bergen, preceding the body only by few days, and thereby greatly limiting the organization of the funeral.

Once in Bergen's bay the boat was met with a procession headed by King Magnus and Peter, bishop of the see. The body was borne through the town to the king's residence where it stayed a night, giving the necessary time to prepare for the funeral ceremony the day after. The next day another solemn procession accompanied the dead king to Christ Church. The cortege included prominent persons: King Magnus and Queen Ingeborg, Margrete the widow, and the whole local clergy. The population of the town was also present and escorted the cortege. Finally, the body was buried in the choir of Christ Church. The ceremony was punctuated by King Magnus holding a speech.⁵⁰⁶

The funeral also had all reason to be a major event for political communication. As Ralph Giesey argues, "the beginning of the reign of a specific king was fictively embedded in the ceremonial obsequies of his predecessor."⁵⁰⁷ The burial of King Håkon constituted the perfect opportunity for Magnus to define his authority as the successor and to display dynastic continuity. First, like the ceremony in Kirkwall, the funeral in Bergen was meant to be a major public event suitable for displaying royal power. Cortege and processions, including

504 *HsH*, Ch. 331.

505 *Ibid.*

506 *Ibid.*

507 Ralph E. Giesey. 1990. "Inaugural Aspects of French Royal Ceremonials." in János M. Bak (ed.) *Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*. University of California Press: 39.

the townsfolk and members of the highest lay and clerical aristocracy, followed the dead king's body to its different destinations. Second, while the dead king played a central and obvious role in the funerals, King Magnus was also omnipresent at every stage of the ceremonies. Magnus headed the cortege from the ship to the king's house when the ship arrived in Bergen. He also accompanied the body in the procession to Christ Church. It was he that held a speech in the church. Neither the speech nor its content is reported in the saga, but the author mentions that the speech was "clever."⁵⁰⁸ Thus the whole funeral displayed a transfer of power which both inaugurated the reign of King Magnus and emphasized the permanency of royal authority. The choice of the choir of Christ Church as location for burial also strengthened dynastic continuity. Both Håkon's father, Håkon Sverresson, and his grandfather, Sverre, were buried in the choir. Magnus's speech over the grave as final act of the royal funeral was thus highly charged with symbolism. The new king succeeded his father in what we could call a royal necropolis.

Solemn Entries in 12th and 13th Century Norway⁵⁰⁹

The itinerant character of Norwegian royal government in the High Middle Ages compelled kings to make frequent visits to the towns of their kingdom. These visits constituted an important element in the economy of kingship. They afforded kings an opportunity to collect income from the *veistla*⁵¹⁰ for themselves and their retinues from the townsmen as well as the revenue from taxes collected from the towns' surroundings. Norwegian towns were also political centres. Nidaros and Bergen were the seats of important town assemblies, *þings*, and arenas for royal acclamations. Written evidence also shows that in the Middle Ages, Norwegian towns were regularly the scene of decisive conflict, such as battles and skirmishes. But towns were also important forums for communication between the king and the urban population, and on occasions the very entry of the sovereign was orchestrated as a grand political ceremony. In a now famous and frequently cited quotation, Bernard Guenée highlighted the major role of the ceremony of royal entries in the dialogue between French kings and their subjects in the 14th and 15th centuries: "neither the written nor the spoken word could stir the heart as deeply as those ceremonies where the

⁵⁰⁸ *HsH*, Ch. 331.

⁵⁰⁹ This chapter is also published in *Scandinavia Journal of History* Vol 39, nr. 3: 314–334.

⁵¹⁰ The institution of the *veitsla* was a system that supplied the king and his men with necessary material resources from the population. The contributions (mostly food) were collected locally at gathering centres, which usually were towns. « Veitsle », by Halvard Bjørkvik, *KLMN*, Vol. XIX: 632–634.

king would appear in person in a *mise en scène* arranged with scrupulous care to exhibit a particular image of himself and his power.”⁵¹¹

Despite Norway’s comparatively low level of urbanisation, entry ceremonies by Norwegian sovereigns also played an important role as a means of royal communication from the end of the 12th century onward. While royal rituals (coronations, *konungstekja*, funerals) were important facets of political culture and the most expressive affirmations of royal power in Norway’s medieval towns, these ceremonies were extraordinary and only occurred once during a reign. As Jean-Philippe Genet has pointed out, the feelings and the impressions that they left in their wake had to be “rekindled” by increasingly frequent rituals. In other words, entry ceremonies kept monarchist sentiments alive.⁵¹²

This chapter addresses the role of Solemn Entries as part of the Norwegian kings’ communication programme from the late 12th and 13th centuries onwards.⁵¹³ It covers two particular political contexts that greatly influenced the political significance of the Solemn Entry and the ways in which different players instrumentalized them. During the Civil war (1130–1240), the claims of competitors to the throne were at times borne out in violent encounters. Cities rarely remained impartial in these conflicts, and pretenders relied on the support of one or more local communities in advancing their claims: Bergen remained faithful to King Magnus Erlingsson (1163–1184) in opposition to King Sverre throughout the former’s lifetime. Oslo was long a bastion of King Håkon’s rivals during the early years of his reign, while Nidaros generally remained committed to Duke Skule Bårdsson (1189–1240) even during his rebellion against King Håkon Håkonsson in 1239. In this context of war, the symbolic support of the city was often accompanied by more tangible support in

511 Bernard Guenée & Françoise Lehoux. 1968. Les entrées royales françaises de 1328 à 1515. Éditions du CNRS: 8. (author’s translation).

512 Guenée 1971, 87.

513 The source situation prevents us from asserting the existence of solemn entries before the reign of King Sverre. The Norwegian synoptic from the 12th century (*HN*, *Historia* and *Ágrip*) does not mention any. Snorri *Heimskringla*, which constitutes the main source on the history on Norwegian kings until King Sverri, the ritual did not exist in the early middle Ages. As a 13th century author, Snorri was well aware of the ritual. The sole reference to *Adventus regis* in the *Heimskringla* is the account of King Sigurd Magnusson and his men entering the great city of Constantinople (*sc*, Ch. 12). The absence of rituals of kingship in Snorri’s work in general has been debated by Sverre Bagge and Birgit Sawyer. For Bagge, Snorri’s account reflects an historical reality whereas Sawyer believes that this absence was purposeful and the result of Snorri’s deep aversion to royalty (Bagge 1987a; Birgit Sawyer. 1993b. “Samhällsbeskrivning i Heimskringla.” *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Nr. 2: 223–237).

the shape of men and resources. But loyalties were also made and broken in the wake of victory and defeat, making royal entries a locus for power struggles and conflict for all the pretenders to the throne. Bishops and local clergy were prime movers in determining the loyalty of a given town. The death of the rebellious Duke Skule at Nidaros in 1240 ushered in an extended period of peace and political stability and allowed the monarchy to consolidate its exclusive authority over Norwegian society. While narrative sources are scarce for the end of the 13th century, they attest to the continued use of the ritual of the Solemn Entry, no longer within the context of war, but rather as part of the on-going competition between the royalty and the Norwegian clergy. The main aim of this chapter is to review how this ritual in particular constituted a power game between the kingship and the clergy.

The very structure of the ritual of entry ceremonies provided its protagonist ideal opportunities for asserting their respective political ambitions. In medieval Norway, as in Western Europe, the ritual by which the king was welcomed

TABLE 1 *List of Solemn Entries 1177–1229*

Sovereigns	Source	Date	Place	Motives
Sverre	SvS § 16	1177	Nidaros	Mil. victory/ <i>Konungstekja</i>
Magnus Erlingsson	SvS § 83	1184	Konghelle	Return from exile
Sverre	SvS § 97	1184	Bergen	1st entry as king/ burial
Håkon Håkonsson	HsH § 19	1217	Bergen	1st entry as king/ <i>Konungstekja</i>
Håkon Håkonsson	HsH § 39	1218	Nidaros	1st entry as king
Håkon Håkonsson	HsH § 48	1218	Oslo	1st entry as king
Håkon Håkonsson	HsH § 99	1223	Tønsberg	Mil. expedition
Håkon Håkonsson	HsH § 214	1240	Nidaros	<i>Konungstekja</i>
Håkon Håkonsson	HsH § 224	1240	Bergen	<i>Konungstekja</i>
H. Håkonsson and Magnus Håkonsson	HsH § 302	1260	Nidaros	Pilgrimage/crisis with clergy
Magnus Håkonsson	HsH § 313	1262	Oslo	1st entry as crowned king
H. Håkonsson, M. Håkonsson and the 2 queens	HsH § 313	1262	Nidaros	1st entry as crowned king
Eirik Magnusson	Abs § 75	1289	Nidaros	Pilgrimage/crisis with clergy

in a city was built as a symbolic dialogue between kings and the urban population. One virtue of these entries was that they represented a bilateral exchange between several players over several periods of time or, as Turner puts it, “processual units and temporal structures.”⁵¹⁴ The arrival of the king himself, or *adventus regis*, and most particularly the circumstances under which this arrival took place, essentially provided kings with a means to manipulate the dialogue in their favour and to display their power and authority.⁵¹⁵ A king’s physical arrival was met by a procession orchestrated by the townspeople, and most particularly by the clerical elite, or *occursus*, which afforded them a chance to express their views and ideas.

In modern historiography, the ritual is referred to by different terms associating it with different realities. At times, the ritual is also referred to as the “Joyous Entry” and is more particularly applied to the Duchy of Brabant or the County of Flanders.⁵¹⁶ The most common term however, “Royal Entry,” is misleading in our context as in medieval historiography it denotes a ritual from the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern period that was institutionalized into a complex set of stages, far removed from the lesser degree of sophistication of the ritual in the High Middle Ages. Moreover, the phenomenon of “Royal Entries” was a ritual too much “confined to a celebration of royal power alone” to correspond to the dialectic character that the ritual still had in the 12th and 13th century.⁵¹⁷ Thus, in order to avoid confusion we will here use the term “Solemn Entry,” which implies a more general definition. The topic is discussed in a comprehensive body of literature on its performance in the Late Middle Ages. In this scholarship, the focus is repeatedly placed on highly urbanized regions such as the Low Countries, Northern France and the Swiss confederation, which provide the most vivid source evidence for Royal Entries. There the ritual was symptomatic of a situation in which towns were invested with a high degree of autonomy, but also confronted with increasing forces of centralization.

514 Victor Turner. 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors. Symbolic action in human society*. Cornell University Press: 43ff.

515 Margot Fassler. 2007. “Adventus at Chartres. Ritual Models for Major Processions.” In Nicholas Hoew (ed.) *Ceremonial Culture in Pre-Moderne Europe*. University of Notre-Dame Press: 13–61.

516 Alfons Dewitt. 1989. “Twee keer Blijde Intrede te Brugge: 1468 Margareta van York; 1515 Karel Prince des Hespaignes.” *Biekorf: Westvlaams archief voor geschiedenis, archeology, taal- en volkskunde* 89: 250–261; J.M. Murray. 1994. “The liturgy of the count’s advent in Bruges, from Galbert to Van eyck.” in B.A. Hanawalt & K.L. Reyerson (ed.) *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 137–152.

517 L.M. Bryant. 1995. “Entries, Royal.” in *Medieval France. An Encyclopedia*. New York & London: Garland Publishing. Inc: 320.321.

For this reason, the ritual has been a convenient subject for the study of communication and the growth of state power in these regions.⁵¹⁸

Surprisingly, despite the existence of significant numbers of accounts, the topic has largely been ignored in Norwegian and international historiography on Norway.⁵¹⁹ The study of Hanne Monclair on the perception of kings in medieval rituals marks an exception. However, her analysis focuses on the ceremonial of the kings' reception in general, and overlooks entries into towns as specific and crucial segments of the broader ritual.⁵²⁰ Yet a diligent search through our sources, essentially *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, has unearthed thirteen examples of Solemn Entry between 1177 and 1289: Bergen (1184, 1217), Konghelle (1184), Nidaros (1177, 1218, twice in 1240, 1260, 1262, 1289), Tønsberg (1223) and Oslo (1218 and 1262). In spite of this extensive corpus of examples, the brevity in which the ceremonies are described presents a challenge to analysis. Nothing or virtually nothing is said about the king's itinerary or of the procession outside and inside the city. As we shall see, the authors of our sources were often careful not to reveal the precise composition of the corteges and processions that accompanied the kings. Nor do we know anything about the possible symbolic value of the processional paraphernalia employed (canopies, banners, marquees) or the costumes worn by the participants. The ritual was a major public event played out citywide. However, with the exception of two occasions where the townspeople's delight is mentioned, the descriptions largely silence chants, slogans and screams from the audience. On the whole, we thus have very little knowledge of the manner in which these rituals were received by the townspeople. Nonetheless, descriptions of entries were placed, as I will show, in a context that is often very informative and that contributes considerably to the interpretation of each ritual and to its understanding.

The Arrival of the King: The Royal "Moment"

The Solemn Entry was crucial. It established an initial balance of power deemed necessary by kings to display their sovereignty and test the allegiance of the cities. These entries also allowed townspeople to display their fealty as well as remind their kings of their responsibilities towards their cities.

⁵¹⁸ For a detailed list of studies on the topic see Brégaïnt 2014: 329.

⁵¹⁹ The field of ritual studies in Scandinavia though has recently seen a number of valuable contributions. See for instance, Boue and Småberg 2012; Esmark, K. *et al.* 2010. *Gaver, ritualer, konflikter. Et rettsantropologisk perspektiv på nordisk middelalderhistorie*. Unipub forlag.

⁵²⁰ Monclair 1995, 51–62.

In order to understand the symbolic and consequently the political importance of the Solemn Entries, we should remember that the arrival of the kings was occasioned by events both before and after the ritual. A military victory or defeat traditionally established a balance of power that provided the basis for a Solemn Entry. The arrival of the king in the city was also prompted by a precise objective. As can be seen in Table 1, many Solemn Entries preceded ceremonies (burials, crowning), particularly a popular assembly during which the king received his title or confirmation thereof: the *konungstekja*.⁵²¹ The Solemn Entry might also be held on the occasion of the sovereign's first visit to the city after his coronation or upon his accession to the throne. A great deal was at stake for the king, for he relied on using the entry and in particular his arrival to gain the city's submission and support. Thus the ritual of the Solemn Entry required meticulous preparation.

In April 1184, a member of the *hirð* of King Magnus Erlingsson, Arnbjörn Jónsson, travelled to the city of Konghelle. His purpose was to prepare for the King's arrival in the city, which was also his return to Norway, as he had taken refuge in Denmark after his defeat by Sverre in Bergen in 1183. When he addressed the inhabitants, Asbjörn emphasized "the necessity of receiving [the king] heartily, for the king wished to make friends of all the folk of the land that were willing to show him honor or any reverence."⁵²² In his efforts to convince them, he spoke at some length about Magnus's strength, mentioning that his lord had obtained the support of the king of Denmark and a large military force. He also dangled before them *miclo leni oc trafti*, "great privileges and his [the king's] protection."⁵²³ Asbjörn's speech was well received and "on the day of the Lord after Easter week, King Magnus arrived at the town with 23 ships. A procession was formed to meet him, and he was received with much joy."⁵²⁴ Under different political circumstances, the townspeople would go to meet the king before his actual arrival in order to test his state of mind. In 1217, King Håkon, who had been acclaimed recently at the *þing* of Nidaros, went to Bergen to have his title confirmed by a new acclamation at the local *þing*. The first acclamation in the city of Nidaros had been dramatic; at the instigation of Archbishop Guttorm, the clergy had refused to participate in the ritual. While Håkon's supporters defied the clergy's refusal, they could not prevent the canons of the cathedral

521 Vestergaard 1990, 119–123.

522 *Talpi micla naðfyn at taca vel við honom. Mill hann vingaz við allt landzfolc þat er honom vill fæmþir veita eða noccora lotning.* (SvS, Ch. 83).

523 *Ibid.*

524 *Drottinf-daginn eptir pásca-víku com Magnús konungr til þóiarins. með .iii. fciþum oc .xx. var þa gor fagr proceffia imot honom oc með miclum fagnaði tekit við honom.* (SvS, Ch. 83).

from sending letters to the clergy of Bergen ordering them not to receive him.⁵²⁵ Fearing that they would bear the brunt of the archbishop's political strategies, the townsmen sent Dagfinn Bondi, a close confidant of the king, to Håkon to inform him of the archbishop's manoeuvres and the dilemma that they faced: either to incur the anger of the archbishop or that of the king!⁵²⁶ Håkon's response could not have been clearer: he wanted to receive the greatest honours from everybody in his kingdom and if they did not duly proffer them, "then it will not be long before they shall know whether it likes us well or ill."⁵²⁷ Once Dagfinn had returned to the town "[...] the bells were rung in the whole village. The clergy came to greet him most honourably."⁵²⁸

These pre-encounters were intended as preparation for the king's entrance into the city by testing the frame of mind either of the king or of the citizens. They also served to persuade the major players using promises and indeed threats. There was therefore usually a waiting period before the arrival of the king and the Solemn Entry as such. In 1184, the emissary for King Magnus Erlingsson preceded him by almost a week. When King Håkon, who had been hunting down rebels in the south of the country, went to Oslo in 1218, Bishop Nicholas, whose sympathy for the rebels was in inverse proportion to his loyalty towards the king, came to meet him and his family. He invited Håkon's mother, Inga, to his palace where, according to the saga, she was particularly well treated. It was only the next day that the bishop organised "a procession to meet the king with every honour."⁵²⁹ What Nicholas got out of this interview with Inga remains uncertain. Be that as it may, the bishop escaped condemnation by the sovereign. The king's arrival occasionally left little time for this kind of preparation, such as in 1240 when King Håkon Håkonsson, pressed for time by the military situation, travelled in great haste to Bergen where "he was immediately welcomed by a procession as soon as he arrived by boat."⁵³⁰

This first stage of the ritual was therefore often an important factor in how events unfolded thereafter, and kings did not hesitate to resort to all the procedures and devices needed to exact an "honourable" welcome. During times of war, it was often necessary to make a show of strength. As we have already

525 *HsH*, Ch. 17.

526 *HsH*, Ch. 18.

527 *Vænnti af þeim allra manna best þeira sem j eru landenu. En nef þeir giora odruvijs. þa skal eigi langt til aadur þeir skulu vita huortt oss likar vel edur jlla. (Ibid.).*

528 *Var hringnt vmm allann bæenn. Enn Lærder menn gengu sæmeliga j moti kongi. (HsH, Ch. 19).*

529 *proceffionem moti konungi með allri femð (HsH, Ch. 48).*

530 *HsH*, Ch. 224.

seen, promises could be used. However, most importantly, it was his impressive fleet that enabled Magnus to wrest a princely welcome from the inhabitants of Konghelle. The size, decoration and positioning of the ships in the harbours were meant to reflect prestige and authority and often led to an exponential “shipbuilding race” between princes. For instance, King Sverre’s ships “Mariasuden” and “Ognarbranden” were the biggest boats of their time.⁵³¹ They were barely seaworthy, but that was not their function. They were meant to impress.

The display of the fleet was thus an important element in the entry of King Sverre into Bergen in June 1184. Some days earlier, he had defeated Magnus Erlingsson’s troops at the Battle of Fimreite, in the course of which Magnus was killed. For the first time, Sverre came to Bergen – a city that had never shown him any particular loyalty – as a victorious king, not as a rebel leader. The entry was therefore a decisive and central episode in all future relations between the king and the inhabitants of Bergen. According to the eponymous saga, Sverre gave strict orders to the boatmen to deploy the fleet in such a way as to impress the townspeople: “Before their arrival in the village, the king ordered the ships to be arranged in such a way that his fleet seemed as imposing as possible in the eyes of the townspeople, “whether they liked it or not.” They did so.”⁵³² By ensuring that his first contact with the town was in part a show of force, the future king thereby took maximum advantage of his military victory. This show of force ultimately proved fully effective, for “when the king arrived in the village, the bells of the entire village were rung to welcome him and a fine procession came out to meet him. Everyone gave him a fine welcome and the king remained there for some time.”⁵³³ In general, the fact that Norwegian kings travelled primarily by boat meant that the size and arrangement of the fleet constituted key elements in the kings’ intimidation strategies both in times of war and in times of peace.

A final example illustrates the importance attached by the kings to their arrival. In 1260, King Håkon and his son King Magnus went on a pilgrimage to Nidaros. When they arrived at the mouth of river Nidelven, the boat carrying both kings ran aground on a sand bank. Although there was no material damage, this occurrence quickly gave rise to a political incident when the archbishop

531 SvS, Chs. 73 and 154. See the analysis of Monclair 1995, 109–138.

532 *Sverrir konungr sigldi fagran byr til Biorgyniar oc aðr en þeir sigldu fyrir boinn. mælti konungr at þeir fcylldu sva haga ferðinni fem boiarins þætti meft lið þeira til at sia. hvar er þeim þickir þat betra eða verra. Oc sva gerðu þeir.* (SvS, Ch. 97).

533 *En er konungr com til boiarins þa var ringt imoti honom. tocu menn vel við honom oc dualþiz konungr þar um hrip.* Ibid.

rowed out his boat and offered to help his sovereigns. While their arrival by no means constituted a show of force, the archbishop's offer of assistance potentially offered the population the humiliating spectacle of the kings' boat tugged by the small boat of the archbishop. The kings refused and awaited high tide, following which they entered the town where they were welcomed by a procession.⁵³⁴

The Procession: An Instrument in the Hands of the Clergy

The procession was essentially the core element of the ritual and distinguished entries from mere visits by kings to their cities. In the ritual of the Solemn Entry, the procession went from the town to meet the king and then accompanied him back to the city centre. It represented a public demonstration of the town's allegiance to the sovereign. There is little reference in documentary sources to the composition of these entries, but everything points towards a dual trend: the clericalisation of the ritual and the subsequent integration of the entry into the dialogue between royalty and archbishops.

Not unlike examples on the continent, where sovereigns travelled overland and were greeted by the townspeople several kilometres outside the town, descriptions suggest that processions greeted sovereigns outside the city walls.⁵³⁵ When King Magnus arrived in Tønsberg, "He was preceded by a very fine procession and received with great joy. Then he entered the town."⁵³⁶ However, the fact that most often kings typically arrived by boat directly into the town harbour reduced the distance they had to travel and rendered the organisation of extramural processions largely obsolete.

But who composed the processions? By definition, the term "procession" designates a religious cortege making its way liturgically toward a specific place with chants, prayers and litanies.⁵³⁷ Our sources, though written in Old Norse, systematically use the Latin terminology: *processione*. However, in contrast to the *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, the *Sverris saga*, which recounts the three entries of Magnus Erlingsson (1184) and Sverre (1177, 1184), does not mention the presence of the clergy, but describes processions composed of *bøiar-menn*, "townsmen," and presents the entries as events involving a wider body

534 *HsH*, Ch. 302.

535 Noël Coulet. 1997. "Les entrées royales en Angleterre: Deux exemples: Les entrées de Richard 11 en 1392 et de Henri 11 en 1451." *Memini: Travaux et Documents* 1: 3–20.

536 *þa var gor fagr proceffia imot honom oc með miclum fagnaði tekit við honom. Sifan gecc hann i bœin* (*SvS*, Ch. 83).

537 See the definition in D.A Davril and É. Palazzo. 2010. *La vie des moines au temps des grandes abbayes*. Paris: pluriel: 140.

of townspeople.⁵³⁸ Thus the meticulously organised entry of King Magnus into Konghelle, which was preceded by the sending of an emissary, was directed at the townspeople in order to urge them to offer a particularly fine welcome to the king. Similarly, according to the saga, King Sverre's show of strength in Bergen preceding his entry was directed at the *bøiar-monnum*, "the townspeople." No details are given about the composition of the procession that welcomed him, which seems to have included the entire population. Although examples from Sverre's reign remain silent on the extent of active clerical participation, they do mention that these entries were accompanied by the sound of bells, which might indeed imply religious overtones, though not necessarily the active involvement of the clergy.⁵³⁹

The explicit absence of clergy from the processions of 1177, 1180 and 1184 might be a reflection of the deeply popular and secular nature of entries in 12th century Norway. Yet while it is inconceivable that local clergy were completely excluded from the processions, it is possible that their actual role or the way they were viewed by their contemporaries had changed. Their absence could also be due to a particular set of political circumstances. The Norwegian bishops opposed Sverre from the moment he made his claim to the throne and throughout his entire reign. The triumphant welcome Sverre received in 1177 after his victory over the party of King Magnus may have been boycotted by the archbishop and his clergy, who supported the ruling king. The absence of the clergy when Sverre made his entrance into Bergen after his final victory over King Magnus may also be justified on the same grounds, for Sverre's show of force demonstrates that real opposition still existed in Bergen. This is less tenable in the case of King Magnus in Tønsberg. Even though it could be argued that his defeat in Bergen in 1183 caused him to lose considerable support and perhaps led some people to be more discreet about displaying their loyalty, there is no evidence that the clergy were amongst those people.

Hákonar saga proposes a completely different picture. In that work, Solemn Entries are represented as essentially a matter for the clergy, systematically conducted by the bishop of the town. In 1217, when Hákon went to Bergen, "the clergy came to greet him most honourably."⁵⁴⁰ Bishop Nicholas led the procession

538 SvS, Chs. 16 and 83.

539 I refer here to the study by Noël Coulet on Royal Entries in Provence where the arrival of the king was also welcomed by bells even though the processions were made up exclusively of lay people, Noël Coulet. 1977. "Les entrées solennelles en Provence au XIV^e siècle." *Ethnologie française* 7: 68–86.

540 *Enn lærder menn gengu sæmeliga j moti kongi* (HsH, Ch. 19).

that greeted Håkon in Oslo in 1218 and in Tønsberg in 1223.⁵⁴¹ In 1240, it was Archbishop Sigurd and the canons that came to meet him.⁵⁴² In 1260, Kings Håkon and Magnus went to Nidaros by sea. When they berthed at the town, “the Archbishop received them with a fine procession.”⁵⁴³ In Oslo in 1262, King Magnus, who was unwell at the time, went directly to the church, where “the Bishop received him with a procession.” In the autumn of the same year, Kings Håkon, Magnus and their queens went to Nidaros where “the Bishop received them with a fine procession.”⁵⁴⁴ The final Solemn Entry is recounted in *Árna saga biskups*: in the summer of 1289, King Eirik and his retinue went on a pilgrimage to honour St Olav in Nidaros, where the archbishop received them with a procession.⁵⁴⁵ The 1218 entry into Nidaros shows that the archbishop’s presence in the procession does appear to have been expected, because the saga mentions that Guttorm showed his opposition to King Håkon precisely by refusing to organise the procession.⁵⁴⁶ The town’s clergy therefore took on the central role within these processions, both by participating in them and by taking the initiative in organising them. The religious character of the processions, for example through the presence of a cross and other relics, cannot be assessed, as the descriptions of the processions in the texts are so brief. We can imagine that the reliquary of St Olav led the processions in Nidaros, as it was far from uncommon for relics of the saint and other relics to be taken out of the cathedral and paraded through the streets of the city on different occasions, such as celebrations of the saint, the hailing of a new king and the reception of ecclesiastic dignitaries.⁵⁴⁷ Although we have no evidence of this, the relics of Saint Sunniva may also have been part of the processions in Bergen.

Is it possible to conclude on these grounds that Solemn Entries became “clericalised” during the 13th century? The absence of the clergy in the different events surrounding the entries (processions, festivities, spectacles) is an attested fact in the first ceremonies in France and in Provence in the 14th century. At that time, the processions were mainly composed of city aldermen and merchant guilds.⁵⁴⁸ Indeed, it would appear that even when the clergy were

541 *HsH*, Chs. 48 and 99.

542 *HsH*, Ch. 214.

543 *giordi erkibiskup j mot þeim fagra proceffionem* (*HsH*, Ch. 302).

544 *giordi biscup proceffionem i mot honum, giordi erkibiskup fagra proceffionem í mot þeim* (*HsH*, Ch. 313).

545 *Asb*, Ch. 143.

546 *HsH*, Ch. 39.

547 Ekroll 2003.

548 Coulet 1977, 513–542.

more closely associated with the ritual, they continued to play only a marginal role.⁵⁴⁹ It was only later, in the 14th century, that clerics became an essential part of the processions.⁵⁵⁰ The question has less to do with the reasons for the absence of the urban clergy from the earliest entries, and more with the reasons for their increased presence.

The picture painted so far of Solemn Entries in Norway raises a methodological issue. The absence or presence of the clergy effectively coincides with the different types and origins of documentary source. As Philippe Buc has shown, textual sources not only help us to reconstruct past rituals but also present cases for specific interpretations of their author, who may have altered their meaning.⁵⁵¹ The *Sverris Saga* and the *Hákonar saga* (1263–1270) are separated by some 50 years, or even 80 years if we bear in mind that the first of these sagas was written in two stages (1185–1188 and 1202–1210). So the first question that arises is whether this change in the role of the clergy can be attributed merely to the different general perceptions of rituals of the authors of these texts.

It is compelling that the processions described in *Sverris Saga* are all to be found in the first part of the saga. This part, more commonly known as *Grýla*, accounts for between a sixth to a quarter of the saga and tells the story of the years prior to Sverre's accession to the throne.⁵⁵² Few rituals are recorded in *Grýla*, which makes it impossible to fully appreciate the importance accorded to them by these writers around 1180. The sequel to the saga, written 20 years later, does however confirm a certain lack of interest in rituals, their organisation and how they developed. Thus the coronation of Sverre in June 1194 was

549 Guenée and Lehoux 1968, 11.

550 François Bordes. 2005. "Rites et Pratiques Cérémonielles à Toulouse au Bas Moyen Age et à la Renaissance." *Mémoires de la Société Archéologique du Midi de la France*, Vol. LXV: 115–138; From the same author, 2004. "Une perception de l'espace urbain: Cortèges officiels et processions générales à Toulouse du XIVE au XVIe siècle." *Mémoires de la société archéologique du midi de la France*, vol. LXIV: 135–153; Mario Damen. 2007. "Princely entries and gift exchange in the Burgundian Low Countries: a crucial link in the late medieval political culture." *Journal of Medieval History* 33: 233–249.

551 Buc 2001. See also Philippe Buc. 2002. "Text and Ritual in Ninth-Century Political Culture: Rome, 864." in G. Althoff, J. Fried and P.J. Geary (ed.) *Medieval Concepts of the Past. Ritual, Memory, Historiography*. Cambridge University Press: 123–138. See also the critical review of Buc's book by Geoffrey Koziol. 2002. "The dangers of polemic: Is ritual still an interesting topic of historical study?" *Early Medieval Europe*, Vol. 11 (4): 367–377.

552 "Sverris saga," by L. Holm-Olsen, KLNLM, Vol. XVII: 551–558. About *Grýla*'s length see also, Þorleifur Hauksson. 2006. "Grýla Karls ábóta." *Gripla* 17: 153–166 and from the same author. 2012. "Implicit ideology and the king's image in Sverris saga." *Scripta Islandica* 63: 127–135.

described in the following extremely laconic terms: “the rite took place on the feast day of apostles Peter and Paul. He accepted the crown and Bishop Nikolas presided over the ritual.”⁵⁵³

It is also possible to argue that the authors of *Grýla* used his work as a political tool. The silence surrounding the role of the local clergy could also be interpreted as a conscious choice on the part of the saga’s authors to minimise the role of that constituency. As mentioned above, the Norwegian clergy had been a continual supporter of King Magnus in opposition to Sverre. The former’s death somehow appeased the tensions with the new king, but their enmity never truly died out. The intimate involvement of the king made *Grýla* a work of political propaganda seeking to demonstrate the divine nature of his vocation, a point that addressed the clergy in particular.⁵⁵⁴ By remaining silent on the role of local clergy in these rituals, the king downplayed their position in the towns and indeed their opposition to his power. This suspicion for authorial manipulation may be sustained by a slightly contemporary episode related in the *Gesta Danorum* by the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus. In 1168, King Valdemar was received by a procession led by the townsmen of Tønsberg, but which according to Saxo “elevated their submission to a religious action.”⁵⁵⁵ Saxo’s words suggest that the inhabitants of Tønsberg organized a procession that included some liturgical elements, possibly relics, which necessarily involved clerics.

Sturla Þórðarson, the author of the *Hákonar saga* clearly showed much more interest in these rituals. His description of the 1247 coronation and the festivities that surrounded the event is detailed in an illustrative manner not even found in the descriptions of the coronations of contemporary European monarchs. The wedding and coronation ceremonies of Hákon’s sons are also described in considerable detail.⁵⁵⁶ The presence of the clergy in the Solemn Entry recorded in the *Hákonar saga* might be accounted for by Sturla’s interest in it and his attention to detail. This author’s interest in rituals might also be indicative of a wider attraction of this type of event for his contemporaries. Finally, we should also consider the absence of references to Solemn Entries in the *Böglunga sögur*, sagas sprecisely relating to events in Norway (1202–1217)

553 þeir vigðu hann til konungf'a degi postolana Petri oc Pali. toc hann coronu oc var Nicholaf byscup hofuðf-maðr at vigflunni. (SvS, Ch. 123).

554 Krag 2005, 45–55; Brekke 1958.

555 “Tunbergenses, quo ceteris regem impensius colerent, finibus suis exceptum honoratissime processionis officio uenerati sunt, religion seruitium cumulantes” (*Gesta Danorum*, Liber 14, 38, 2.).

556 HsH, Chs. 274, 308–310.

between *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga*. This absence is difficult to interpret all the more that we ignore the identity of their authors and the circumstances of their redaction.⁵⁵⁷

The centrality of the clergy in Solemn Entries is all the more conspicuous in the use of the ritual by the clergy for political purposes. Throughout the civil war (1130–1240), the Norwegian Church was deeply involved in the competition for royal power and was seldom without a clear preference for one candidate to the throne over another. The ceremonial of the Solemn Entry was crucial in the assertion of loyalty to kings, and the local clergy actively used the ritual to comfort or undermine the candidates' legitimacy.

The beginning of the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson (1217–1263), like that of his forbear Sverre, was marked by a vigorous questioning of his legitimacy as candidate for the throne. Håkon Håkonsson was effectively none other than the bastard son of King Håkon Sverresson (1202–1204) and did not comply with the laws of succession that the Church had established in 1163, a Church which preferred the earl, Skule Bårdsson, over him.⁵⁵⁸ However, Håkonsson was recognised by the allies of King Håkon Sverresson, who proclaimed him king at the *Eyraping* in 1217.⁵⁵⁹ So strong was the archbishop's opposition that he would not allow the relics of Saint Olaf to be taken to the *ping*. It is in this context that we should interpret the Solemn Entry of 1217 into Bergen and of 1218 into Nidaros. Once proclaimed King, the young Håkon Håkonsson went to Bergen to be recognised by the local assembly of the *Gulaping* as was customary at the time. As we have seen, his arrival was preceded by letters from the archbishop enjoining the clerics in Bergen not to receive the king. However, Bergen's clergy defied the ban and "The bells were rung throughout the entire village. The clergy came to greet him most honourably."⁵⁶⁰ In the following spring of 1218, King Håkon and the earl went together to Nidaros, giving the archbishop the opportunity to once more display his opposition to Håkon. *Hákonar saga* recounts that "the bells were not rung to welcome them, and the archbishop did not organise any procession to welcome the king."⁵⁶¹ The enmity of the prelate towards the king becomes clearer when it is later said

557 "Boglunga sogur," by Hallvard Magerøy, KLN M Vol. II: 35.

558 Here I refer to the Law of Royal Succession of 1163, which established the principles of primogeniture and legitimacy of birth. See Tobiassen 1964, 181–273.

559 *HsH*, Ch. 17.

560 *Var hringgt vmm allann bæenn. Enn Lærder menn gengu sæmeliga j moti kongi.* (*HsH*, Ch. 19).

561 *Eckí uar hringt j motí þeim. ok aunga proceffionem uilldí erchibiskup gera j motí konungi.* (*HsH*, Chs. 39).

that “when the earl went alone to the church [*krist-kirkiu*], he received princely honours.”⁵⁶² When the earl and the king went together to the church on Palm Sunday, “the king was not honoured nor indeed either of them. And when they were led to the altar to make an offering, the archbishop did not turn round to face the king and was not willing to accept his offering.”⁵⁶³ The archbishop can be seen to have displayed his opposition on various occasions. The consecrated setting of the church, however, limited the scope of the archbishop’s action to a small group of spectators, who were privileged because they were certainly from the town’s elite, if limited in number. But the ritual of the Solemn Entry was a more powerful tool in the hands of the archbishop to show his disapprobation to all the townspeople by welcoming the king with silent bells and an absence of procession.

A third example from the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson again shows the instrumentalization of Solemn Entries by the clergy. Skule, now elevated to the rank of duke, had openly declared his rebellion against King Håkon by proclaiming himself king at the *Eyraping* in November 1239. In the summer of 1240, Håkon went first to Nidaros and then to Bergen. In these particular circumstances, Håkon’s visit to Nidaros was the proverbial placing of his head in the lion’s mouth. The saga suggests the presence of the duke’s supporters in town and some of his troops in the direct vicinity. The inhabitants were at that time in a precarious position, having recently afforded accommodation to the rebellious duke and, most importantly, having appointed him king at their *þing*. The saga therefore omits any references to popular participation in the king’s procession. The king however could rely on one pivotal ally in town: Archbishop Sigurd (1231–1252), who, unlike Guttorm, had diligently maintained his loyalty to the king. Sigurd had earlier opposed to the acclamation of Skule by refusing to let the reliquary of the St Olav be carried out to the *þing*. It was only he, together with the cathedral canons, who braved danger and came to meet Håkon.⁵⁶⁴ The procession headed by the archbishop was thus a testimony of his personal political support rather than a popular demonstration of loyalty on the part of the town.

While the procession provided the clergy with a privileged forum for communication and political power, the king still occupied a central role within it. The solemnity and all effects were designed around his person. Our texts do not provide details on their appearance, but it is conceivable that kings wore

⁵⁶² *Jarl uar einn j krist-kirkiu. þa uar honum ueitt hôþþinglig tign. (Ibid.).*

⁵⁶³ *Uar honum ueitt ok huarigum þeira. Ek er þeir vöru leiddir til altaris at ofra. þa villdí erchi-biskup eckí fnuaz ímotí. (Ibid.).*

⁵⁶⁴ *HsH*, Ch. 214.

royal insignia and ceremonial costumes much like their Western European counterparts. It should be recalled that the monarchy also had its own resources for visually imposing royal authority in these rituals: the *hirð*. In his travels, the king was most frequently accompanied by his retinue and particularly by his *hirð*, his personal guard. The descriptions of the entries do not mention the role of the *hirð* in the procession, though this contingent had become an essential tool for communicating the authority of the Norwegian kings in the middle of the 13th century. Several texts made by the royalty, such as the *Hirðskrá*, or Law of the *hirð* and the *Konungs Skuggsiá*, describe in detail how the king's men were compelled to form a cortege around their sovereign whenever he travelled around the city.⁵⁶⁵ Thus the author of *Hirðskrá* advises the men of the *hirð* that, “the retinue will be to his advantage, whether armed or not, if you march in equal numbers either side of the king. Wherever you go, he should walk in the middle, and you and your companions should be arranged in equal numbers in front and behind of him and on either side.”⁵⁶⁶

The entry of Cardinal William of Sabina into Bergen in 1247 illustrates the role of the *hirð* in processions. Though not a royal entry but a ritual staged for the arrival of a church prelate, the king played a crucial role in organizing the reception. In the summer of 1247, William entered the harbour of Bergen by boat with the mission to lead the crowning of the Norwegian king. The saga relates that King Hákon prepared his best boat to meet the archbishop. He boarded that vessel with his bodyguard, while “all the stewards who were in the town ran out their ship and rowed thither where the cardinal lay.”⁵⁶⁷ The king then came onto the cardinal's boat with his liegemen and captains of the bodyguard before heading ashore.⁵⁶⁸ Then a procession headed by the bishops and the local clergy was organized to receive the naval cortege. The scale of the fleet, the elegance of the boats, and the status of its participants were undoubtedly meant to impress the visitor. The arrival of the cardinal's boat with the king on board and an accompaniment of royal stewards and men of the *hirð* was also intended as a powerful display to the inhabitants of the town and the Norwegian and foreign guests who had come for the coronation.

565 III, 5.6.1.

566 þa er sva fægrst fylgð yður at þer ganger iammarger a hvara tuæggia lið hanum oc þo hvargar mæð balluttum flocki. Æfniit sua til at hann uærði imiðiu yðru forunuti staddr þar sæm þer ganget oc þer uærðer iam marger a hvara tuæggia lið hanum eða fram i fra hanum. (*Kgs*, Ch. xxxvii).

567 En allir sýslumenn, þeir er i bænum voru, lögðu út skipum sínum, ok þangat sem kardináli lá. *HsH*, Ch. 249.

568 *Konúngr kallaði með sér lenda menu ok hirðstjóra, [...] ok fótu svá inn at bryggjum (Ibid.).*

Not least, this visual demonstration aimed to overawe the Norwegian bishops who were to attend the ceremony. Indeed, their very participation had been a point of heated negotiations with the king, who rejected the clergy's conditions and presided over the organization of the event without their assistance. In accompanying the person who would crown him himself, and in delivering him to the bishops, King Håkon gave a powerful demonstration of his authority and of his control over his consecration. The participation of the *hirð* at any stage of the process was decisive for the king as it augmented his prestige and presence. The role of the *hirð* can also be seen as counterbalancing the processions of clerics that met the royal cortege and often gathered as a large group of priests, canons, and monks. The presence of the *hirð* around the king was not only meant to match the size of the procession, but also to redress the symbolic balance of power in the ritual in favour of the king.

Solemn Entry: War Ritual and Institutionalisation

The analysis above has shown the importance of the circumstances in which the Solemn Entry took place during the civil war (1130–1240). At a time when candidates were competing for the throne and the legitimacy of sovereigns was frequently challenged, the loyalty of towns was decisive. The role of the towns was all the more important when they hosted key events governing royal succession such as the *konungstekja* or coronations. The entries then became a flexible and interactive tool, suitable for being actively employed in the political strategies of the kings or the Church to attain their goals.

Between 1177 and 1240, the circumstances surrounding entries varied considerably, yet conflict remained a common feature in each of the cases. What happened to the ritual after this conflict came to an end and a line of kings succeeded in establishing their rule unchallenged? The source situation is not favourable enough to propose a solid interpretation of the use of Solemn Entries after 1240. While *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* provides several instances, there are no or few documentary sources to account for all the other important events or circumstances likely to give rise to the organisation of this ritual after 1263, that is, the end of the saga of Håkon. The *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* is largely incomplete and that of Bishop Arne (which covers the period 1217–1300), although providing one example, displays too little interest in the situation in Norway to cast any light on these issues. Despite this, we can tentatively venture to discuss two matters: the particular situation of Nidaros after 1240 and the role of the ritual in the relationship with the archbishop, and the institutionalization of Solemn Entries as a mean of celebrating a new crowned king.

The frequency of Nidaros in our corpus of entry ceremonials after 1240 is compelling. Except for Oslo (1261), Nidaros was the main location for Solemn

Entries in three of our four cases. This privileged position appears all the more remarkable when one considers the now total absence of Bergen, which had been a major locus for entries during the preceding period. It is my contention that Nidaros's dominance is related to its status as the seat of the archbishop and head of the Church. Of course we are reliant on not entirely unproblematic sources, but could it be that the ritual of the Solemn Entry became a privileged element in the relationship between Norwegian kings and the archbishops of the Norwegian Church? Evidence of this might be found in the two entries of 1260 and 1289.

Despite the return of a peaceful context in the 13th century, these two of the last four entries were closely linked to high tension between the royalty and the Church of Norway (1216 and 1229). On both occasions, they were a pretext for a pilgrimage to the tomb of St Olav. However, beyond the devotional motivation of the royal visits lay deeper conflicting reasons for these travels. In 1260, King Håkon went to Nidaros for the week-long celebrations for the saint.⁵⁶⁹ However, this visit took place at the time of one of the most serious crises of the reign of Håkon Håkonsson. The king and the archbishop violently disagreed over the election of the Bishop of Hamar. Following the death of Bishop Peter, the archbishop chose Lodin against the will of the king and therefore a meeting was to be held at Nidaros to discuss this choice. The reception of the king has already been mentioned earlier. The king's refusal to accept the help of the archbishop after running his ship aground in the mouth of the River Nidelva clearly illustrates the intensity of the conflict. But it also shows the archbishop's goodwill towards the king, confirmed by the procession that he organized. The entry of King Eirik into the town of Nidaros in the winter of 1289 takes place under similar circumstances: "In October, King Eirik decided to embark on a pilgrimage to St Olav in Nidaros. [...] Then the king rode with his court to the North to Trondheim and he arrived in Nidaros on the day of St Martin. The archbishop was there and received them with a procession."⁵⁷⁰ Again this pilgrimage masked a tense political situation between the king and his archbishop. In the decade between 1270 and 1280, a major conflict had developed between the crown and the clergy over the respective jurisdictions of the two institutions. The crisis reached its apex after the coronation of Eirik in 1280, when Archbishop Jon Raude excommunicated the king's barons for confiscations and systematic encroachments on the rights of the Church. The

⁵⁶⁹ HsH, Ch. 302.

⁵⁷⁰ *Nær vetrnóttum rēð Eirekr konúgr at fara pílagrímsferð til hins Ólafs konúngs í Niðarósi [...] þadan riðu þeir norðr á leið til þrándheims, ok kómu til Niðaróss Marteinsmessudag; var herra erkibiskup þar fyrir, ok gerði processionem móti þeim.* (Asb, Ch. 75).

exile and then death of the archbishop in 1283 left the archdiocese vacant until the election of Jørund four years later.⁵⁷¹ Eirik's visit to Nidaros constituted his first confrontation with the new archbishop, as the latter had not met the king since he had returned from Rome with his *pallium* in 1287. The Solemn Entry was therefore central in establishing the balance of power not only between the two men, but also between the court and the Church.

Solemn Entries after the civil war not only need to be seen against a background of recurring crises between the Norwegian royalty and the episcopate, but also in connection to the installation of a new monarch. The procession that welcomed King Magnus to Oslo in spring 1262 took place in seemingly benign political circumstances: "During his journey, King Magnus fell ill [...] And when he returned to his boat he was very ill and for that reason he went towards Oslo, because he wanted to be with the king [Håkon] in case his illness got any worse. His health improved by the time of his arrival. Then he went to the church, and the Bishop made the procession to greet him."⁵⁷² While this was not the first time that King Magnus had been to Oslo, it was the first time he entered as a crowned king. Indeed, this entry should be interpreted as a proof of the allegiance of the bishop of Oslo to a king who had been crowned in the course of the previous summer (1261). Even though the saga is not explicit, it must have been for the same reason that in the following autumn, Kings Håkon and Magnus and the two queens were received by the archbishop of Nidaros, who made a procession to welcome them.⁵⁷³ These entries could be taken as evidence that the ritual was becoming institutionalised: the Solemn Entry was now linked to the duties of the king and the exaltation of royalty and was less of a response to a particular political context. Examples from elsewhere in Europe, admittedly at a later time, show the role of the entries in the exaltation of pro-royal feelings as "an important moment in the royal religion."⁵⁷⁴

Of course, the relative lack of sources renders the hypothesis tentative. Between 1240 and the end of the 13th century there was no shortage of opportunities to hold rituals of this nature. Yet the coronation of King Håkon Håkonsson in 1247 did not give rise to any Solemn Entry in any of the cities in the kingdom. The same was the case with the acclamations to the throne of Kings Håkon the

571 Helle 1964, 177–181.

572 *J þeffari ferd feck Magnús kongr siucleika [...] ok er hann kom ofan til skips var hann miok siukur. ok fyrir þui fneri hann inn til ofloar at hann villde ecki vera hia konginum ef fottinn felldi at honum. ok er hann kom þar var honum mun lettara. Geck hann þa vp til kirkju ok giordi biscop processionem i mot honum.* (HsH, Ch. 313).

573 *Ibid.*

574 Guénée and Lehoux 1968, 18.

Young (1240) and Magnus (1257), their respective weddings in Oslo in 1251 and Bergen in 1261. This same absence of documentary sources does not allow us to confirm the use of Solemn Entry in periods of domestic conflict. Apart from the mention of the episode relating to Eirik Magnusson in 1289 in *Árna saga biskup*, which could be explained by the fact that this was a religious event (a pilgrimage), the two decades of crisis between the monarchy on one side and archbishops Jon Raude and Jørund (1273–1290) on the other made no recurrent use of the ritual of the Solemn Entry. The same applies for the heightened tensions between the two institutions under the regency of Duchess Ingeborg Håkon Håkonsdatter (1319–1323).⁵⁷⁵

Our examination of Solemn Entries has shown that behind this apparent sobriety – possibly due to our surviving sources – the ritual concealed a complexity, which made it a sophisticated communication tool in the service of its protagonists' political ambitions. The examination discussed above reveals that the ritual was composed of several different steps, each of them furnishing a specific momentum and space for display. Solemn Entries certainly occupied a special place in royal communication; indeed, very few ceremonies offered kings and subjects such an opportunity for dialogue. Nor was it an exclusive instrument of kings. Sovereigns effectively had at their disposal various resources with which to make these entries a tool for communicating their political ambitions. Kings never arrived on their own. Their fleets and most likely their retinue participated actively in the ritual and were determined to make their influence felt when the townsmen greeted them.

While the analysis above only goes some way towards showing the extent of popular participation, it demonstrates the absence of any secular interlocutor amongst the townspeople with greater certainty. Despite an increase in urban development in Norway in the 13th century, the urban lay elite appear to have played only a marginal role in terms of politics or communication. What the analysis does show is that Solemn Entries were an element of a privileged dialogue between the king and the town clergy. The domination of Norwegian bishops over the means of ritual communication in towns placed the reception of kings in their hand. Processions became the means by which they defended their political interests as much during the civil war as afterwards. In 13th century Norway, political communication was largely limited to the elites, and towns provided an arena for communication that, far from being restricted to the local context of the towns, appears rather to have been part of the broader context of the struggle for political power between the king and the Norwegian Church.

575 Bagge 2010a, 312–316.

Controlling Rituals. Ceremonial Location

The previous chapter illustrated how the spatial context of royal rituals and ceremonies determined the conditions for communication. Processions in the streets of towns, coronation or funeral ceremonies in churches and banquets and festivities in the royal palace defined the very nature of the message, its medium and its reception. The choice of these locations was most often imposed by the urban topography, which dictated the itinerary of a procession for instance. Religious ceremonies and rituals needed to be performed within sacred precincts like churches or spaces "sanctified" by relics. Conversely, profane festivities could absolutely not take place in such places, which provided princes and kings with the opportunity to make available spaces under their control. Ritual and ceremonial location could also be a power issue between the two great institutions of the crown and the Church.

The decisive advantage granted by the control of ceremonial places led the Norwegian royalty to appropriate the *loci* of the rituals of kingship. This process of appropriation led to the foundation of centers of ritualistic communication. In the following we will address the development of Bergen as the ceremonial center for royal coronations and funerals in the 13th century. As it has become clear throughout this study, the communication of kings and of the Church constantly interacted both through collaboration and opposition. In the 12th century, the ritual of the *konungstekja* and the introduction of royal coronations had marked an early and decisive process of appropriation and acculturation of the system of the profane ritual of kingship by the Church (see 1, 2). Through laws and practice, the archbishops had striven to establish Nidaros as the centralized location for the rituals of kingship. In the 13th century, the aims of royal communication would collide with those of the Church. We will see how, through laws and practice, the Norwegian king disputed Nidaros's supremacy.

While in the 12th century the archbishops of Nidaros dreamed of hosting coronation ceremonies in their cathedral, not a single Norwegian king was crowned in Nidaros in the 13th century. Invariably Christ Church in Bergen was the dynasty's coronation church. We do not know whether archbishops even kept their prerogative as officiators. However, in the accounts of royal coronations we can detect traces of discussions or protestations from the Church concerning this rejection. However, neither Archbishops Sigurd, Einar nor Jon Raude objected to crowning their kings in Bergen or made it a matter of negotiation.

King Håkon Håkonsson's coronation was an exceptional event for the clergy as it was only the third such crowning in Norwegian history. As mentioned above (see 1, 4), King Magnus Erlingsson probably was crowned a second time

in Nidaros in 1163. After the ceremony of King Sverre, which had been performed in the particular context of the conflict between the king and the archbishop and without the latter's agreement, the ceremony of 1247 provided a fresh opportunity for the archbishop to reinstate his metropolis. However it appears clear that the organization of the ceremony largely lay out with the clergy's control. Thus, although the crowning was a well-prepared event, the possibility of performing the ceremony in Nidaros is not alluded a single time in the saga. Moreover, from early on, King Håkon sought to be crowned not by his archbishop, but by Cardinal William of Sabina, who came to perform the coronation. In fact we have no knowledge of who placed the crown on the king's head in 1247. The description of the ceremony is not clear and vaguely mentions the simultaneous presence of the archbishop, the bishops and the papal legate.⁵⁷⁶ The presence of Rome's prelate relegated the Norwegian bishops to a secondary role. For instance, according to the *Hákonar saga* the date of the consecration, which was a religious issue, was discussed by the cardinal and the king alone.⁵⁷⁷

Sturla's account of Magnus the Lawmender's crowning (1261) also remains silent on the identity of who performed the coronation.⁵⁷⁸ It is only later in the saga that Archbishop Einar comes forward as the one who crowned the king and the queen.⁵⁷⁹ The saga also clearly distances the clergy from any involvement in the decision to crown King Magnus. The ceremony was performed in Bergen, a few days after the marriage of Magnus with the Danish princess Ingeborg. The decision to crown King Magnus was proposed rather abruptly by King Håkon during the wedding celebrations.⁵⁸⁰ There is no suggestion that King Håkon discussed the matter with the archbishop beforehand. In fact, the archbishop's opinion is not mentioned at all. The following coronation ceremonies are described so succinctly that we cannot gauge the stakes of the ceremony. Thus the sole account of the crowning of King Eirik, *Árnas saga biskups*, barely mentions that it was Archbishop Jon who presided over the crowning in 1280, once again in Bergen.⁵⁸¹

The domination of Bergen in royal coronations was thus never challenged between 1247 and 1280. The *Hákonar saga* even suggests that the archbishops were only involved in the decision process to a limited extent. In some particular

⁵⁷⁶ *HsH*, Ch. 257.

⁵⁷⁷ *HsH*, Ch. 252.

⁵⁷⁸ *HsH*, Ch. 310.

⁵⁷⁹ *HsH*, Ch. 312.

⁵⁸⁰ *HsH*, Ch. 309.

⁵⁸¹ *Asb*, Ch. 56.

contexts, like in 1261, we could argue that the rapidity of the decisions left little scope for archbishops to defend the position of Nidaros. The example of Håkon's crowning rather implies the centrality in the process of the king, who kept firm control of the ceremony's organization and the level of involvement of the Norwegian Church.

Bergen, a Royal necropolis?

The town of Bergen was not only the place that made Norwegian kings by the grace of God; it was also their final resting place. The ritual of royal funerals was a major medium for royal legitimacy. Paul Binski even sees a strong symbolic connection between crowning and burial.⁵⁸² Royal funerals included processions and speeches honoring not only the memory of the dead king, but the authority of his successor as well. Usually the ritual unfolded in an urban environment: the cortege making its way through streets and gates, sometimes stopping at crosses and churches, finally ending at the burial place. To a large extent the ritual moved through locations which, beyond the moment of the actual funeral, escaped royal control. The nature of the burial site was thus a fundamental issue for the crown and the affirmation of its legitimacy, as it was to house royal remnants permanently. It is on this occasion that the issue of a royal necropolis becomes fundamental.⁵⁸³

A royal necropolis is a site gathering the sepulchers of kings and royal persons across the generations. More than a simple funerary space, it is a location with a political function and heavily loaded with ideological principles. The necropolis creates a synthesis between the sovereigns' religious dimension and their genealogical heritage. As such it was used by ruling kings to affirm the dynastic continuity of their power as well as its divine origin. In welcoming different kings from the same family, a royal necropolis contributed to glorifying the memory of a dynasty.

The existence of a necropolis presented significant advantages in the use of royal funerals as a medium for communication. It offered the kingship a specific frame for royal burials that was more than a simple cult place, as every church basically was, instead representing a place of worship of the kingship dedicated to the exaltation of a lineage. As such, all burials that took place in the context of

⁵⁸² Binski 1996, 60.

⁵⁸³ Erlande-Brandenburg 1968, 49–108; Binski 1996, 70–122; Sergio Bertelli. *The King's Body. Sacred Rituals of power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. The Pennsylvania State University Press 2001: 214–215; Ernst H. Kantorowicz. (1957) 1997. *The King's Two Bodies*. Princeton University Press: 409–437; Dectot 2009, 7–14; Michael Evans. 2007. *The death of kings*. *Hambledom continuum*: 25–31.

a royal necropolis were magnified by the place's symbolic significance. This significance could be enhanced visually by the presence of the tombs, sarcophagi and "gisants" of former ancestors.⁵⁸⁴ In the absence of such monuments, as in the case of interments in the church as a whole, royal insignia could be hung to signal the presence of royal sepulchers. In some instances they indicated the identity of the defunct king, as in the case of King Sverre's tomb that displayed his shield and weapons.⁵⁸⁵ A royal necropolis constituted the logical conclusion in a chain of communication, which from the procession to the place of interment was entirely committed to the celebration of dynastic continuity.

In Western Europe we have several examples of royal necropolis. The most famous are Speyer Cathedral for the German emperors, San Isodoro for the Kings of León-Castile, the Abbey of St-Denis for the Capetians, the abbatial church of Fontevrault for the Plantagenets and Westminster Abbey for the Kings of England.⁵⁸⁶ The model was by no mean universal, however. For example, Castile and Aragon's dynasties did not develop royal necropolis and scattered royal tombs in different places throughout their kingdoms. Returning to Scandinavia, the picture becomes less precise. In the High Middle Ages there was no royal necropolis for Danish kings. Some elements of dynastic continuity are found for Swedish kings during the 12th and 13th centuries. King Sverker (d. 1156) and his heirs were all interred in Alvastra Abbey until 1222. Likewise, the successors of Canute I Eriksson (d. 1195) were laid in the vicinity of their forefather in the Abbey of Varnhem until 1250. Later however, no single funeral place was to stand out as a privileged place for royal sepulchers.⁵⁸⁷ Former studies have not addressed the issue of a necropolis for the Norwegian kings in the High Middle Ages. In his article on royal burials "Om De Kongelige Begravelser I Norge Efter Hedendommen," Nicolaysen limits himself to pointing out regular patterns in the location for royal burials – Nidaros in the 11th and 12th century, Bergen in the 13th century, Oslo in the 14th century – and the great variety of churches used as burial sites.⁵⁸⁸

584 Erlande-Brandenburg 1968, 109–130.

585 SvS, Ch. 182. See also the analysis of Sverre's funerals and burial in 11, 2.

586 For Saint-Denis see Erlande-Brandenburg 1968, 68–86; For Fontevrault see *Fontevraud, volume spécial de la revue 303, Arts, Recherches et créations*, n° 67, 2000. For Westminster see Binski 1995; D.A. Carpenter. 2003. *The Reign of Henri III*. Bloomsbury Academic: 409–459. About Castilian necropolis see Ricardo del Arco y Garay. 1954. *Sepulcros de la Casa Real de Castilla*. Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Jerónimo Zurita; Dectot 2009.

587 Thomas Lindkvist. 2003. "Kings and provinces in Sweden." in Knut Helle (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*. Vol 1. Cambridge University Press: 226.

588 Nicolaysen 1870, 10.

The Failure of Nidaros

In Norway there was indeed a great variety of locations for royal burials. No less than twelve different churches were used between the interment of King Magnus Olafsson in 1047 and King Håkon VI in 1380. However, there are some clear patterns of continuity.⁵⁸⁹

Between 1047 and 1217, Nidaros was the privileged place for royal burials. We can even ascribe to King Olav Kyrre the first clear attempt to found a royal necropolis around Christ Church in Nidaros. King Olav himself had the church built and the sagas tell that although he died in Båhuslen, far away from Nidaros, his remains were transported all the way back to Christ Church.⁵⁹⁰ After him, seven kings were buried in the church until the early 13th century.⁵⁹¹ In the late 12th century however, kings started to be buried in Bergen. While Bård Guttormsson (1194) and Guttorm Sigurdsson (d. 1204) still were interred in Nidaros, King Magnus Erlingsson (d. 1184), his son Sigurd Magnusson (d. 1194) and King Sverre (d. 1202) were entombed in Christ Church in Bergen. During most of the 13th century, it was Bergen that was to welcome almost all royal funerals: Håkon Sverresson (1204), Håkon Håkonsson (1264), and Eirik Magnusson (1299). So were Erik's wife, Queen Margaret, in 1283, and his daughter in 1290. Other places housed royal sepulchers during the same period. Nidaros, Oslo and Tønsberg received the body of Norwegian royalty in 1185 (Cecilia, sister of Sverre), in 1188 (Jon Kuflung), 1207 (Erling Steinvegg), Duke Skule in 1240 and King Håkon the Young in 1257.⁵⁹²

Thus the Cathedral of Nidaros appears to have failed to remain the preferred location for royal burials precisely at the time that its archbishops aimed to make their metropolitan see the center for royal consecrations (see I, 4). The tradition of burying kings in the town preceded the foundation of the archbishopric province in 1152/53 and we cannot thus ascribe this function to the archbishops' political ambitions. Still, the creation of the archiepiscopal province Nidaros had played a central role in the establishing of the monarchy in Norway. In particular, with the coronation of King Magnus Erlingsson rituals and principles belonging to a common royal Christian ideology had been introduced, which largely built upon the cult of St Olav whose relics lay in the cathedral. The shrine of St Olav was the foundation of Nidaros's authority.

589 *Ibid.*

590 *OK*, Ch. 11.

591 Håkon Magnusson (d. 1094), Olav Magnusson (d. 1115), Eystein Magnusson (d. 1123), Håkon II Sigurdsson (d. 1162).

592 Nicolaysen 1870, 12.

It was the reason the cathedral was erected and the town elevated to the seat of the archiepiscopal province. The centrality of St Olav's relics was also expressed in the very architecture of the Cathedral as they were placed in the octagon, "the architectonic center in the Cathedral."⁵⁹³ In a general manner the proximity of the relics was determinant for kings in their choice of royal burials.⁵⁹⁴ The Capetian kings wanted to rest near the relics of St Denis to gain his power and protection. The relics of Edward the Confessor made Westminster the preferred resting place of English rulers in the 13th century.⁵⁹⁵ In view of this, why Nidaros did not remain the privileged place for Norwegian royal burials?

As has now become clear, the nature of the relationship between the Church and the kingship had major consequences for royal culture and communication. In the 12th and 13th century, the relationship between the Norwegian Church and the Norwegian rulers was changeable. The period was characterized by the civil war, in which the Church was an active supporter of one side or the other most of the time. The break with the tradition of burying kings in Nidaros coincided with the open conflict between the Church and the kingship under the reign of King Sverre and the episcopate of Archbishop Eirik. King Sverre died in Bergen in 1202 and was interred in the cathedral. But during his lifetime he buried his enemies, King Magnus Erlingsson and Earl Erling, in Bergen as well.

The choice of burial place may have been due to natural circumstances. But, as examples from Western Europe show, it may also have been conditioned by political considerations. In several instances, the choice of royal burial sites was to express a political expansion, which often was synonymous with a geographical one. Thus, in Capetian France, both Kings Philip I (1060–1108) and Louis VII (1137–1180) broke with the secular tradition of being buried within the walls of the basilica of St-Denis and were interred south of Paris, in the Abbey of St-Benoît-sur-Loire and in the Cistercian Abbey of Barbeau respectively. According to Erlande-Brandenburg this choice reflected the extension of the royal domain and in particular the displacement of its gravity center southward.⁵⁹⁶ In the conflict between the Church, in particular the archbishops, and Sverre, the use of the Cathedral of Nidaros was a political issue. We can assume that Archbishop Eirik, who denied Sverre any royal legitimacy, would not have permitted him to be buried in the cathedral. Similarly, in consciously choosing Bergen instead of Nidaros, King Sverre broke with its monopoly

593 Ekroll 2003, 325.

594 Binski 1996, 60 ff.

595 Evans 2007, 26–27.

596 Erlande-Brandenburg 1968, 75–76.

on royal burials and the royal policy of his predecessors, and established a new locus for later princely interments.⁵⁹⁷

The Success of Bergen

The question that now arises is whether Bergen's monopolization of nearly all Norwegian royal burials in the 13th century reflected political aims and can be interpreted as part of a program to offer the Sverrir dynasty a central and unique location for royal interment.

As Christ Church in Bergen became the final resting place of most royal remains between 1184 and 1299, it may have pretended to the status of the necropolis of the Norwegian kings. However, the lack of sources makes it difficult to assert to what extent the *loci* for royal burials were the outcome of a conscious choice made by the king or simply the result of circumstances. For instance, the very choice of Christ Church is blurred by the fact that in most cases, the defunct person had died precisely in Bergen. In many instances, the choice of burial location was directly determined by practical contingencies. In 1184, King Magnus Erlingsson was thus buried in Christ Church in Bergen. The proximity between the battlefield and the town must have been the deciding factor. It was however Sverre who transported Magnus's body to Bergen. King Sverre himself was interred in the same church. Was it his wish or due to the simple fact that he was staying in the town when he fell sick?⁵⁹⁸ Similarly, Håkon Sverresson fell sick in Bergen at Yule and died shortly after.⁵⁹⁹ He was also interred in Christ Church. Finally, King Håkon the Young was buried in St Halvard's church in Oslo as he died in the Viken.⁶⁰⁰ The sole evidence of dynastic continuity through the choice of location of sepulchers stems from King Håkon the Old.

In the same manner as we have speculated on the failure to make the Cathedral of Nidaros the necropolis of Norwegian kings, we have to question the political ambitions of the clergy of Bergen. The creation of a royal necropolis could be the work of kings alone, for instance through the foundation *ex nihilo* of a church or monastery. But it could also be tributary to the joint efforts of a king and an existing clerical institution willing to attract royal burials. In housing the remnants of kings, a church or a monastery could gain enormous prestige, political influence and economic benefit. In Capetian France, the basilica of St-Denis, official necropolis of the kings of France, not only cemented the

597 Nicolaysen 1870, 3–9.

598 SvS, Chs. 180–181.

599 HsH, Ch. 2.

600 HsH, Ch. 288.

association between the French monarchy and the Church, but also ascribed the monks and the abbey considerable prestige. The collaboration between the Norwegian Church and the kingship in the 12th century pointed to the choice of Nidaros. Christ Church was not a royal foundation and the creation of a necropolis there necessarily involved the participation of its owners. It is difficult to discern any particular ambitions on part of the Bishops of Bergen for Bergen to become the favorite burial site of the Sverrir dynasty. Judging by the good relationship between Bishop Martin (1194–1199, 1202–1217) and King Sverre, Bergen was surely more favorably disposed than Nidaros towards accepting the sepulcher of a king whom many of the clergy considered a usurper. Before being elected bishop, Martin had already been chaplain of the king (*hirðprest*) and his election was strongly supported by the king himself. Martin participated in Sverre's crowning in 1194. Although Martin yielded to papal pressure and left Norway and the king from 1199 to 1202, in his absence the local clergy may have remained favorable towards the king and accepted to provide Sverre with an honorable funeral. When he came back in 1202, Bishop Martin continued to espouse the cause of the Birkebeiners and their rulers. Bishop Hávard (1217–1224) was also largely favorable towards the Sverrir dynasty. In 1217 he supported the election of Håkon Håkonsson and received him ostentatiously when he arrived in Bergen.⁶⁰¹ As Bergen increasingly became the kings' main residence, the bishops were often intimately integrated to the government of the realm. Bishops Arne (1226–1256), Peter (1257–1270) and Askatin (1270–1277) usually held the functions of councilors, diplomatic envoys or/and chancellors.⁶⁰²

We have to assume so far that there is no evidence of any political ambition on part of the bishops of Bergen to raise their see to the center for royal consecrations. On the contrary, we have evidence that the choice of Bergen and Christ Church as the site for royal burials, possibly as the *locus* for a royal necropolis, chiefly was the doing of kings.

The first explicit indication of choosing Bergen as a place for royal burial is found for King Håkon Håkonsson. We know from his saga that the king was on the Orkneys when he fell ill and that he took some important decisions on his deathbed. He thus confirmed royal succession to his heir, King Magnus the Lawmender. Furthermore, "King Håkon had so settled in his sickness that his body should be carried to Norway and that he should to be buried in Bergen with his fathers and other kinsmen."⁶⁰³

601 *HsH*, Ch. 19.

602 Ludvig Daae. 1901. «Om Bergens bispedømme i middelalderen.» *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) 4, Vol. 1: 250–255.

603 *vildi hann vera grafinn í Björgyn hjá feðr sínum ok öðrum frændum.* (*HsH*, Ch. 331).

The strength of the king's desire to be buried in Christ Church in Bergen is all the more remarkable as it posed considerable practical and logistic problems which could not have slipped the king's mind. The season (winter) was not particularly suitable for a quick journey back to Norway. The transportation of the king's remains had to wait weeks, if not months. In the meantime the body's decomposition had to be stopped. According to the saga, the corpse was washed and shaved. It is not mentioned whether the body was embalmed in order to check the putrefaction process. Once in Bergen, the body was solemnly carried through the streets but remained totally covered, which suggests that it may have not been presentable. On the Orkneys, the body had also been buried in the choir of St Magnus's Cathedral as a provisional measure to conserve the corpse. All these undertakings show that the king's wish must have been particularly strong.

However, can we interpret this wish as the manifestation of a conscious plan to establish dynastic continuity through the making of a royal necropolis in Bergen? Or was it rather the idea of a dying man suddenly obsessed with dynastic considerations? In order to answer this question, we need to examine the topoi of dynastic continuity in royal ideology during the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson. An indication of Håkon's dynastic consciousness is found in the episode when the dying king let "The tale of the kings from Halfdan the Black, and so on all of the kings of Norway, one after the other" be read out loud to him. Later, when this was done, "he let them take to reading Sverris saga."⁶⁰⁴ Although this can be interpreted as the king's wish to be entertained while waiting for recovery, it can also demonstrate his interest in his ancestors and the great lineage of past Norwegian kings at the very moment of his death.

Diplomatic sources also provide some insights. In a general manner, the corpus of charters and letters from the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson is so limited that it prevents the drawing of definitive conclusions. Only nine documents exist. Yet some aspects of charter terminology reveal a new concern for dynastic inheritance with King Håkon. In a letter addressed to Henry III of England, dating from 1223–24, the Norwegian king wishes to perpetuate the friendship between himself and the English king such as King John had with *antecessores nostros*.⁶⁰⁵ The Latin word *antecessor* has two meanings.⁶⁰⁶ It can

604 *lèt hann leas sèr konúngatal frá Hálfðáni svarta, ok síðan frá öllum Noregs konúngum, hverjum eptir annan* (HsH, Ch. 329).

605 David Brégaint. 2009. "The Royal Order in Norwegian diplomas, 1202–1263." *Collegium Medievale* 22: 55–86.

606 Niermeyer, «antecessor», 62.

be translated as “predecessor” and thus refer to any earlier king, or it can be understood as “ancestor,” that is, earlier kings of the same kin. Since Henry III’s father, King John, ruled from 1199 to 1216, if *antecessores* refers to Håkon’s ancestors, it must allude to King Sverre and his son Håkon Sverresson. If the term refers to preceding kings, it could also include King Inge Bårdsson (1204–17) and King Filippus (1208–17). Although these two latter fostered good relationships with the English king,⁶⁰⁷ the letter most probably refers to King John’s unfailing support for King Sverre; a support exemplified by John’s defiance of Pope Innocent III’s interdiction on keeping diplomatic ties with King Sverre (1200) and more particularly by the sending of 200 Welsh mercenaries in 1201 to assist Sverre against the Baglers.⁶⁰⁸ These details suggest fairly certainly that when King Håkon invoked his *antecessores* in 1223–24, he was referring to the kings from his dynasty.

Norwegian royal diplomas however experienced other changes in terminology which may reflect the idea of dynastic continuity. Tainted by usurpation, King Sverre (1187–1202) inaugurated the use of dynastic legitimation in royal titles. In the *intitulatio* from the single extant diploma from his reign, Sverre refers to his alleged father, King Sigurd Haraldsson (1138–1155): *Sverrir Magnus konongr sun Sigurðar konongs* (King Sverre the great, son of King Sigurd).⁶⁰⁹ It should be however mentioned that the document is not the original, but a copy dated from the eighteenth century. The title may thus have been adapted to fit later terminological tradition. If the charter reflects late 12th century norms, Sverre’s son, King Håkon Sverresson (1202–1204) apparently did not perpetuate the practice and simply used the title of king in his letter to the bishops of 1202.⁶¹⁰ So did King Inge Bårdsson (1204–1217) and King Filippus Simonsson (1207–1217).⁶¹¹

King Håkon Håkonsson however renewed with the tradition in systematically applying a terminology which laid emphasis on the dynastic dimension of the royal office in *intitulationes* of his charters. All the charters extant from his reign thus refer to the king as

607 King Inge actually received from King John three rings of Gold with sapphires in 1210 (*RN* 345) and a silver bowl in 1215 (*DN* XIX, nr. 108), and King Filippus sent *austurcos* hawks to the English king in 1212 (*RN* 348). Other documents also witness of gift exchanges between King John and the king of Norway, without it is possible to determine whether it was King Inge or King Filippus (*RN* 362, 364, 365).

608 SvS, Ch. 174.

609 *NgL*, I p. 409.

610 *DN* VIII nr. 5.

611 *DN* I nr. 3.

Hakon konongr son Hakonar konongs (1222, 1224, 1226–54)⁶¹²

Hákon konungr son Hákonar konungs sonarson Sverris konungs
(1219–63, 1260)⁶¹³

, or to *Hakon med guðs miskun noregs konongr sun Hakonar konongs*
(1247, 1263)⁶¹⁴

Behind this great variety of denominations, the systematic addition of *son Hakonar konongs*, “son of King Håkon” referring to his father, King Håkon Sverresson, or up to his grandfather, *son Hákonar konungs sonarson Sverris konungs*, “son of King Håkon and grandson of King Sverre,” clearly shows how the king framed his reign in the continuity with his ancestors.⁶¹⁵ The conclusion is that the idea of dynastic legitimacy to the throne was present in the ideology of King Håkon Håkonsson. The making of a necropolis could thus have been in keeping with this idea. Yet Håkon’s direct successor, Magnus the Lawmender, challenged this very project.

King Magnus made two wills. A first, which has not survived, was written in summer 1268, probably in connection with the death of his only son Olav a year earlier.⁶¹⁶ A second will, which has been preserved, was made on 1 February 1277.⁶¹⁷ The document lists several donations from the king to different clerical and monastic institutions. It also states that the king *apud fratres Minores Bergis ecclesiasticam providente domino eligimus sepulturam*, “wished to be buried in the church of St Olav in Bergen.” In his will, King Magnus strongly forbade anybody to stand against his choice: *in hac electione sepulture prohibemus firmiter auctoritate dei patris omnipotentis, quod nullus nostrorum, quacumque nos propinquitate aut cognacione contingens vel familiaritate, obicem nobis presumat opponere contrarie voluntatis*. It is important to note that the will did not concern the government of the realm after the king’s death or the confirmation of the succession, but only donations to religious foundations and dispositions for his burial. The will is a testament to the piety of the king, but also to his concern for the location of his burial.

The Church of St Olav: A New Necropolis?

In his will, King Magnus selected St-Olav’s Church as his last resting place. The church of St-Olav lay in *Vågsbotn*, one kilometer southeast of the royal palace.

⁶¹² Respectively *DN* II nr. 5, *DN* III nr. 1, and *DN* I nr. 51.

⁶¹³ *NgL* I, 459; *NgL* I, 121.

⁶¹⁴ *NgL* I, 454; *NgL* I, 462–463.

⁶¹⁵ Brégaint 2009, 55–86.

⁶¹⁶ *RN* 64.

⁶¹⁷ *DN* IV nr 3.

The choice thus broke with a tradition inaugurated by his grandfather, King Sverre. This express demand is a rather bad fit with dynastic continuity. As Dectot has pointed out, however, the scattering of burial places did not necessarily mean that kings neglected the affirmation of dynastic continuity.⁶¹⁸ On the contrary, the choice of a new burial site can be regarded as a second foundational act of a royal necropolis.

As its name indicates, the church chosen by King Magnus was dedicated to St Olav, the kingdom's patron saint. Was this choice determined by the will to strengthen the connection with the patron saint? Nothing is certain. We know though that Magnus had his first son baptized Olav (1262/1267). His father Håkon Håkonsson however had also named his first son Olav (1227, died young), without it being possible to detect any particular connection to the saint during his reign. A few documents issued by Magnus referred to the saint, like his will (1 February 1277), which was written *ad honorem* [...] *beatique Olavi martyris*.⁶¹⁹ Two other charters also referred to the saint: a charter of protection to the canons of Nidaros from December 1265 and an amendment on the tithe and the tax of Olav from 1267.⁶²⁰ However, we cannot perceive any particularly remarkable use of the saint in King Magnus's royal ideology.

The king's choice to be buried in St-Olav's Church was linked more closely to the Franciscan monastery which the church belonged to. The Franciscans were a new and "modern" order, which expanded rapidly throughout Europe in the mid-13th century and in Norway in the 1260s.⁶²¹ The church of St-Olav, which originally dates from the mid-12th century, was rebuilt after a series of fires in 1248 and 1270. In the early 1250s, King Håkon had the church rebuilt in stone and placed a new building destined for the Franciscans beside it.⁶²² King Magnus the Lawmender however remains the church's main benefactor. In his will, King Magnus endowed St-Olav's church with all the silver the king had destined for the poor. He also granted the Franciscans the most generous donation received by any monastery in Norway at the time: 700 marks for the construction of the church.⁶²³ After the fire of 1270, which destroyed most of the church, he was personally involved in its rebuilding. On this occasion, the building was greatly extended with an enlarged choir to receive royal

⁶¹⁸ Dectot 2009, 181–202.

⁶¹⁹ *DN* IV, nr 3.

⁶²⁰ *DN* II, nr 12 and *NgL* II, 453.

⁶²¹ Moorman 1988, 155–176.

⁶²² Helle 1982, 576–577.

⁶²³ *DN* IV, nr 3.

burials.⁶²⁴ Did he try to make it the receptacle of all future royal burials? We do not know as again there are no sources that explicitly mention this wish. Furthermore, later royal burials – Queen Margrete (1283), Princess Margaret (1290) and King Eirik Magnusson (1299) – took place in Christ Church.⁶²⁵

Magnus's choice was thus an anomaly most probably determined more by his personal religiosity than by a political agenda. The fact remains that his sepulcher is located in the town of Bergen, just few hundred meters from the dynasty's main burial site. In practice, Christ Church operated as a royal necropolis as it housed almost all royal persons from the Sverrir dynasty between 1202 and 1199, with the notable exception of King Magnus. The quest for clear evidence of a political ambition to establish a royal necropolis in Christ Church appears difficult. If such an ambition existed, however, we can ascribe it to King Håkon Håkonsson, who the most clearly expressed his wish to be buried with his forefathers.

Finally, the example of the last representative of the Sverrir dynasty, Håkon v Magnusson (1299–1319), illustrates that the tentative attempts to create permanent centers of ritual communication in Norway sooner or later were doomed to fail. In 1319 Håkon v Magnusson was buried in St-Mary's Church in Oslo, inaugurating a new location for royal burials. The choice of Oslo was no chance, as the town had been Håkon's central residence as Duke as well as as king. The selection of St-Mary's Church seems also logical in view of the king's regular significant donations to the church and his commitment to its construction as a monumental building, "shining as a cathedral."⁶²⁶ Although the tradition was once again broken, the burial of King Håkon v still exemplifies the constant attention paid by Norwegian sovereigns to celebrating their death with monuments.

Konungstekja: *Disputing Nidaros's Supremacy*

Under the lead of the Church, the ritual of the *konungstekja* had experienced major changes during the second half of the 12th and the first half of the 13th century. Through the *Law of Royal succession* of 1163 and the growing presence of liturgy in the ritual, the clergy increased its influence on the making of kings and made Nidaros the chief location of the *konungstekja*.

From the mid-13th century onwards, the position of Nidaros in the *konungstekja* would be a central issue in the struggle between the Church and kings.

624 Helle 1982, 576; Bugge 1931, 10–25.

625 Nicolaysen, 1870.

626 G.A. Blom. 1992. *Norge i union på 1300-tallet*. Vol 1, Tapir Forlag: 32 ff.

The location of the *konungstekja* at the very center of archiepiscopal authority gave the bishops major symbolic power over the ritual and the process of royal succession in general. Increasingly, the Norwegian kingship was to contest the supremacy of the archiepiscopal metropolis in the ritual, at times in boycotting the *Eyraping* or in deliberately minimizing its position in the laws of succession.

Royal ambitions were realized through laws. King Håkon Håkonsson and Magnus the Lawmender enacted a regulation of the *konungstekja* in the *Hirðskrá* (1274) as well as in two new laws of succession (1260, 1273), which contained not only rules for royal succession but also regulations for rituals and ceremonies. This legislation partly sanctioned earlier customs, but it also introduced new elements which consolidated royal control.

The most remarkable change concerns the function of the *konungstekja* which, over the course of the century, evolved from a procedure of electing one among several contenders to a ritual designation of heirs to royal succession. This evolution stood in direct connection to the growing establishing of dynastic principles.⁶²⁷

The Konungstekja of Magnus 1257

The first step of this enterprise was not the product of a conscious policy or a planned strategy, but rather the result of an unexpected event. In the summer of 1257, Håkon's older son, Håkon the Young, died in an accident. At the time, King Håkon Håkonsson and his army were leading a military campaign against the King of Denmark in the Eskriles.⁶²⁸ Håkon the Young had been designated as his father's successor when he was acclaimed king in 1240.⁶²⁹ When King Håkon the Old, accompanied by his younger son Magnus, departed for Denmark with his fleet, he entrusted his son with the rule of the kingdom during his absence. The death of King Håkon the Young was thus a dramatic event as it left the kingdom without a ruler in place. Moreover, Håkon's death was a major threat to royal succession. King Håkon was engaged in a war and his own death was a possibility. It became urgent to tie Håkon's second and surviving son, Magnus, to the throne. As Sturla writes, "it seemed to all most prudent that the land should not be kingless while king Hacon was away out of the realm."⁶³⁰ Håkon thus summoned Archbishop Einar and his men to a *þing* where Magnus

627 Helle 1964, 86.

628 *HsH*, Ch. 291.

629 *HsH*, Ch. 223.

630 *þotti ollum uarlígra at landit uæri ecki konglauft medan on kongr uæri j burt ur ríkinu* (*HsH*, Ch. 291).

was acclaimed king. Then he received the oath of the *hirð* and, in order to recreate the *þing*'s representativeness, of twelve men from each province in Norway picked from among the king's warriors. For the first time in a century, the election of a Norwegian king did not take place in Nidaros or Bergen. It did even not happen on Norwegian ground.

The decision to organize Magnus's *konungstekja* in Denmark had been dictated by the emergency of the situation. However, everybody was still conscious of the election location's exceptional character. Indeed, it was on this occasion that Sturla stressed the pre-eminence of the *Eyrapping* as the privileged locus for royal elections and the abnormality of what had happened:

But although it was mostly the custom that the king should be chosen in Trondheim at the *Eyrapping*, then it seemed to all the most prudent that the land should not be kingless while Hacon was away out of the realm.⁶³¹

Thus the position of Nidaros had been challenged as a result of practical contingencies. However, something deeper was maybe at play: When the kings were back to Norway, King Magnus was not acclaimed at any Norwegian *þings* as was the custom, although there had been opportunities. During the next winter the two kings went together to Bergen where King Håkon granted his son the apanage of Rygja, a province north of Bergen. The saga does not indicate the *Gulaping* was held on this occasion. Moreover, after Bergen, the two kings travelled north to Nidaros where they stayed the whole winter.⁶³² Yet there is no mention of a new ritual of *konungstekja* for Magnus there either.

These omissions are difficult to interpret. There is no reason to believe that the author of the saga remained silent on the reproduction of the acclamation at other *þings* on purpose. In view of the saga's general purpose, it is doubtful that Sturla consciously omitted to refer to the organization of these *þings* if they really happened, as the confirmation of Magnus's title "nationwide" could only reinforce his legitimacy. Still, there is a paradox between Sturla's emphasis on the pre-eminence of Nidaros in the process and its omission few pages later. A point may be that Sturla underlined the position of Nidaros only as a customary practice and not necessarily as a legitimate one. Was the position of Nidaros in the ritual really challenged?

631 *en þo at hit uæri "meðtr" vandi at kongr uæri tekinn j þrandheime aa eyra-þinge. þa þotti ollum uarlígra at landit uæri ecki konglauft meðan Hakon kongr uæri j burt ur ríkinu. (HsH, Ch. 291).*

632 *HsH, Ch. 293.*

The New Law of Succession 1260

The new Law of Succession of 1260 offers new insights here. In 1257, Magnus had received the title of king outside the traditional frame of the *konungstekja*. Nonetheless there was no opposition to his election in the Eskriles. Indeed, the monarchy was so strong that the old king, Håkon, judged that time had come to redefine the rules for royal succession. In the summer of 1260, King Håkon and King Magnus travelled north to the region of Frosta, where Håkon summoned the *þing* to pass two new laws, a revision of *Frostaping* law and in particular a new Law of Succession.⁶³³ The Law of Succession of 1260 was the second law since 1163. It was strongly influenced by its predecessor and reproduced and developed several of its principles and practices. But the law was also innovative as it introduced original elements that strengthened royal control over the *konungstekja*.

King Håkon Håkonsson's 1260 Law of Succession has been regarded as a crucial moment in the establishing of hereditary monarchy in Norway.⁶³⁴ Like the previous law, it strengthened hereditary succession, such as primogeniture and legitimate birth, and added a list of the order of succession among the king's heirs, in order of the king's legitimate and illegitimate sons. The law consolidated dynastic principles as it stated that if nobody were to match these criteria, royal succession would devolve to someone else from the dynasty.⁶³⁵

In particular, the new law borrowed several elements from the law of 1163, such as the requirement to hold a general assembly in Nidaros to choose the new king. According to the law of 1163, this election was to be headed by the bishops and the candidate would be judged suitable on the basis of religious criteria. Scholars agree that the law ascribed the Church great influence on the choice of the new king, as it gave the clergy the right to choose the representatives from the people and gave the bishops the last word in case of disagreement.⁶³⁶ The law of 1260 preserved some elements of the earlier law and adapted.

Thereafter, after the king's fall, then the heir, all the bishops and abbots, hirdstjorene, all lagmen with the entire hird is summoned to seek north to the Saint King Olaf, his kin. And hirdstjorene shall name with them the 12 wisest men from each bishopric, and they shall depart within the first

633 *HsH*, Ch. 302.

634 Authén Blom 1972, 28 ff. Johan Schreiner. 1946. "Loveene om tronfølgeloven 1163–1273," in *Festskrift til Erik Arup*: 88–104.

635 *NgL* 11, 308.

636 Tobiassen 1964, 181–273.

month after they are known with the king's fall. Then the heir shall summon the general *Eyrapping*, and there he shall be taken as king and swear his subjects law and justice, but them to him the land and submission.⁶³⁷

Thus the new law retained the requirement to go north to Nidaros, but in contrast to the law of 1163, it did not refer to a general meeting, but explicitly designated the ceremony of the *konungstekja* at the *Eyrapping*. The new law also completely discarded the principle of an election of a candidate in accordance with religious criteria of suitability. The meeting lost its elective function, instead becoming an event that sanctioned dynastic succession. The *konungstekja* had become now a ritual of designation.

The most remarkable aspect of the law of 1260 is that it definitively sanctioned the primacy of the *Eyrapping* as the unique place for the kingmaking. There is no reference of any need to repeat the acclamation at any other regional *ping*, as the presence of representatives from the realm's bishoprics ascribed the ritual a "national" dimension. Similarly, the new law kept the references to the cult of St Olav. The text enhances the connection with the saintly king, pointing to their kinship: *hins hælga Olafs konongs, frænda sins*. Moreover, once the king was elected he had to swear an oath to the people, and the barons and the people had to swear fealty to the king. These oaths were made on relics, which – given the location of the ritual – could only have been those of St Olav. The law now institutionalized the pre-eminence which the *Eyrapping* had acquired in the first half of the 13th century in practice in the election of king.⁶³⁸ Together with the references to the relics of St Olav, it sanctioned the central role of Nidaros in the *konungstekja*.

In order to understand the significance of this disposition we need to analyze the circumstances surrounding the adoption of the law. The making of a new law of succession necessarily involved the Norwegian Church, who had been the main initiator of the first law in 1163. The law was adopted at a general assembly at the *Frostaping* in 1260 in the presence of the clergy and "with the

637 *Sidan eiptir frafall konongs. þa se sialfbodet konongs efni biskupum ollom oc abottom. hirdstiorum: oc logmannvm ollum med hird alla oc soeckia nordr till hins hælga Olafs konongs frænda sins oc nefne hirdstiorar med ser .xij. hina vistratu men or hværiv biskups riki oc se a for jnnan fvrsta manadar sidan þæir fregna konongs frafall. þa latte konongs æfni stemfna almennilegt Oeyrapping. oc se þar till konongs tæikin oc svæiri þegnom sinvm log hoc rettindi en þæir honom lond oc þægna.* (NgL 11, 308).

638 Johan Schreiner. 1946–48b. "Tronfølgeloven av 1260." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 34, Oslo: 639, and from the same author in the same journal 1946–1948b, 533.

counsel and agreement of [...] Archbishop Einar and other bishops, learned and unlearned men.”⁶³⁹

The law was the result of a bargain in which the Church succeeded in retaining some of the previous law of succession's central principles while King Håkon Håkonsson managed to make decisive changes. When analyzing the role of the *hirð* in the ritual as defined in the law of 1260, it is apparent that the Norwegian clergy lost grip on the process of succession to the benefit of the king's retainers. However, the Church succeeded not only in preserving the privileged position of Nidaros but it also clearly exceeded the expectations of the thinkers of the previous law of 1163 in discarding the role of the other *þings*. As argued above, the issue of Nidaros as a location for rituals of kingship was central for the Norwegian clergy from the mid-12th century. It was probably no less central in the late 1250s when a new king was acclaimed outside the *Eyraping* for the first time.

To what extent the episode of Magnus's *konungstekja* influenced the relationship between the king and the archbishop, and the preparation of the law is difficult to assess. The prelatute of Archbishop Einar (1255–1263) had begun auspiciously. True, Einar participated actively in the election of Magnus. Sturla cites the archbishop's favorable speech associating Magnus to the kingship since Håkon the Young was dead. The archbishop also played a central role in the ritual, as it was he who gave Magnus the title of king.⁶⁴⁰

Behind this apparent atmosphere of consent the saga suggests there, slumbered the seeds of disagreement. It appears that two matters were at stake that day: the decision to hail Magnus as king and the necessity to do it there and then. On the request of the king, Einar pronounced himself in favor of giving Magnus the title of king. Nonetheless, Einar's words do not include his opinion on the necessity to perform the ritual immediately. We have already mentioned Sturla's remark about the custom of choosing a king at the *Eyraping* in Nidaros. This statement may have been made on purpose, as it comes right after the decision was taken to give Magnus the royal title. It is my contention that it may reflect the arguments that were used in a discussion between opposing parties about the necessity to perform the ritual outside Norway: the custom to choose kings at the *Eyraping* against the necessity to break with this tradition for security reasons. Although the saga notes that the decision was unanimous (*þotti ollum uarlígra at landít uæri ecki konglauft*), some may have given in reluctantly. The archbishop may have agreed to hail Magnus, but also may have

639 *með raðe oc samþvækt [...] Einars erckibiskups og annarra líoðbiskupa. lændra manna oc lærðra* (HsH, Ch. 303).

640 HsH, Ch. 292.

been against carrying this out outside the traditional locus. It is striking that after the *konungstekja* Archbishop Einar did not participate to the celebrations because, as Sturla explains, “he had a great hurt in his hand.”⁶⁴¹ Was Einar’s hurt real or only a pretext not to participate to the festivities? Could it be a literary artifice that Sturla used to signal the prelate’s absence without revealing his real motive? The fact remains that once they were back in Norway, the relationship went sour. In the winter of 1258, Archbishop Einar did not meet the king in Tønsberg, and the saga recounts: “for him and the king had departed with some coldness.”⁶⁴² Tensions blew up in spring 1260 when the archbishop chose Sira Lodin as Bishop of Hamar against the will of the king, who preferred Gilbert, Bishop of the Southern Islands (Man, Sodor and the Hebrides).⁶⁴³

Something happened in Denmark that summer 1257, and the *konungstekja* of King Magnus may have been central. If we go back to the law of succession of 1260 we could argue that, in view of this analysis, King Håkon may have made a concession to the archbishop on a matter which Einar considered as essential, the status of Nidaros in the ritual of the *konungstekja*.

1273. *Nidaros Back and Forth*

In the summer of 1273 a meeting was organized in Bergen in presence of the king and the whole lay and clerical elite of the country. The meeting was motivated by a papal letter a year earlier, in which Pope Gregory X summoned Archbishop Jon to a synod in Lyon set for 1274.⁶⁴⁴ On this occasion, the pope asked his Norwegian prelate to account for the situation of the Church in his province and in particular how the Church’s rights were taken care of. In Jon’s view, these rights had been significantly encroached upon by royal power over the preceding decades. The meeting in Bergen was an opportunity for the archbishop to redefine the jurisdictional fields of the kingship and of the Church on a broad and permanent basis. In practice this meant the confirmation of the Church’s jurisdictional and economical rights and perhaps the granting of new ones. For the kingship, the meeting presented the opportunity to consolidate the achievements of two decades of progress in legal matters. Control over the rituals of royal succession was again central. Two different events in July defined the ritual of the *konungstekja*: the designation of Magnus’s sons (1273) and a new Law of Succession (1273).

641 *Erkibiskupi uar miok illt j hendi ok uar hann fyrir þui ecki þar. (Ibid.).*

642 *HsH*, Ch. 295.

643 *HsH*, Ch. 302.

644 *RN* 100.

In the midst of the discussions with the Church, King Magnus chose the right moment to summon an assembly and organize a *hirðstefna*, a meeting of the *hirð*. *Magnus saga* gives us a quite detailed account, though incomplete, of the ritual.

Two nights after the Mass of St Peter, King Magnus held a meeting with the Hird in the summer Hall and announced there that he wanted to give princely titles to his sons. Then he also gave his men stipulations about the good customs which he wanted them to follow when it deals with the carrying of weapons and others things. The morning after, it was Mass for the church of the Apostles in the king's yard. The king participated in the office and the Mass in the morning, but the heirs listened to the Mass of *De spiritu sancto* in Christ church in the afternoon. But after that the thing was set up in the yard of Christ church and everything was ordained like the king had said before at the meeting. [...] Afterwards Constable Vigleik spoke on behalf of the Hird, and after that spoke the archbishop. [...] Then king Magnus held a beautiful speech, and concluded in giving his son Eirik the title of king and Håkon the title of duke. They went then to the shrine of Saint Sunniva and placed their hands...⁶⁴⁵

It is striking first of all that once again the ritual of designation was not organized in Nidaros. This time, in contrast to the earlier kingmaking of 1257, the choice of the Bergen was not motivated by a critical political situation. In theory it also contradicted the current law of 1260 that bound the ritual to Nidaros. However, the law referred only to the ritual of kingmaking after the death of the king and not to the association of heirs with the crown during his lifetime. The *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* is largely incomplete and the account of what happened after the ritual is missing. However, the Icelandic compilation of Annals, the *Gottskálksannáll*, provides informations about summer 1275. This is particularly convenient because it shows that like in 1257, the ceremonial was not

645 *Tveim nóttum eptir Pétrsmessu hafði Magnús konúgr hirðstefnu i sumarhöllinni, ok gördi þá bert um þa ráðagörð, er hann vildi vera láta um höfðingjanöfn sona sinna. Skírði hann þá ok sínum mönnum um þa siðsemð, sem hann vildi at þeir hefðu, um vâpnaburð ok aðra hluti. Um morgininn eptir var kanúka messudagr Jesú ok guði at postulakirkju, ok hafði Magnús konúgr þar tíðir snimma um morgininn ok messu, en júnkherrarnir útmessu at Kristskirkju de spiritu sancto. En eptir þat var þing sett i Kristskirjugarði, ok svâ skipat sem konúgrinn sagði fyrir á fundinum [...] síðan talaði Vigleikr stallari af hendi hirðarinnar; eptir þat talaði erchibiskupinn [...] Eptir þat talaði konúgrinn fagra tölu, ok lauk með því at hann gaf Eiríki syni sínum konúgs nafn, en Hákon hertoganafn. Gengu þeir þá at skríni hinnar heilagu Sunnifu, ok lögðu sínar hendr. (ML s, 163).*

repeated at any other *þings*. According to the annals, in summer 1275, almost two years after the *konungstekja*, King Magnus and his heirs were in Nidaros and summoned the *Eyrathing* only for Magnus to make known his sons' new titles.⁶⁴⁶ In the early seventies thus, although the law sanctioned the role of the *þing* of Nidaros, in practice the *Eyrathing* clearly played second fiddle in the designation of Norwegian kings; the assembly was visited late and its political role was reduced to sanction a *fait accompli* and not to perform the *konungstekja*.

The Law of Succession of 1273 must be considered part of a more comprehensive project of legislation worked out by King Magnus the Lawmender during his reign. Before the meeting of Bergen, Magnus had already undertaken the revision of provincial laws of the, *Gulapings* (1267) *Borgarþing* and *Eidsiváping* (1268), which would later be replaced by a National Law (1274). The new law of succession was thus another expression of the king's project to establish royal authority over more and more aspects of society. The law of 1273 must also be seen in the context of negotiations with the Church. The meeting of Bergen aimed at revising the law of 1260 and at working out an agreement between the king and the archbishop.⁶⁴⁷ The Law of Succession thus reflected both a consolidation of royal power in the process of succession and a compromise with the Church's claims.

Generally, the law confirmed and strengthened the principles of hereditary succession. In particular, it greatly increased the succession order of dynastic inheritance. In contrast to the law of 1260, which only counted three degrees of inheritance, the new law listed thirteen inheritance categories. Moreover, for the first time the new law allowed women to inherit royal titles. It is clear that the law was discussed in association with the archbishop and although it foiled the Church's ambition to impose the law of 1163, Jon obtained important concessions. Thus, the hand of the archbishop is evident in the reintroduction of the principle of an election at a "national" meeting in Nidaros in the absence of direct or indirect heirs, which was first pronounced in the law of 1163.⁶⁴⁸

Now if it should fall so heavily to our lot that none of these persons are to be found, then the duke and the earl, if there are to be found, and all of the bishops and abbots, and all of the barons [lendlmen] and Hird leaders along with the entire Hird shall consider themselves summoned north to

646 *Gks*, 331.

647 Schreiner 1946–48b, 642 ff.

648 The mention of the stewards finds in most copies of the *Hirðskrá* yet not in all of them. In some manuscripts it stands only the bishops.

Niðaros to the Holy King Olaf for a conference with the archbishop. And each bishop shall appoint from his diocese, and the stewards who are there, twelve of the wisest men and they shall be on their way within a month after learning of the king's decease.⁶⁴⁹

The admonition to the lay and clerical elite to “seek north to Nidaros” so as to hail a new king again strongly emphasized the role of the town as the ceremonial locus for royal succession.

Although the admonition in the new law to go north to choose a new king no longer referred to the *konungstekja*, the ritual was not removed from the law. On the contrary, the new law of succession was completed with the first detailed description of the ritual.

Now it shall be told how that person is to be taken as king whom God in His grace has given and ordained to us as leader and lord, shall be taken according the just laws of succession. In preference it should happen on a holy day or a Sunday if no things of utmost urgency should prevent it.

When the leading men have come together, the thing shall be summoned according to ancient custom. [...]

On the day the thing is held, it shall be sound [the horns] early in the morning to notify all the people of the thing. And then the entire Hird shall take on full battle dress and prepare themselves as honorably as possible, each according to his rank. Then the king's heir shall let the *De spiritu sancto* Mass be sung and read out aloud with these *collectum*. *Deus in te sperantium fortitudo*, *De domina*, *De sancto Olauo*, *De omnibus sanctis*. Then, after the Mass, the king's heir shall go to the altar and call on God's mercy with all his heart and the intercession of Saint Mary and the Saint king Olaf. Then he shall bow to his knee and receive the benediction of the bishops, and after which the holy cross and other holy relics will be brought forth. And then the holy cross, together with other holy relics shall follow him in procession.

All the men who are able shall proceed to the place where the thing is to be held. [...] As soon as the thing is seated up and in order, the most distinguished man, be he learned or lay, shall give the title of king to the

649 *Nu ef fua harðliga kan til hanða at berazt. at engi er þessara til þa fe sialfftefnt hertoga æða jarli ef þeir ero til oc byskopum ollum oc abotum oc ollum barrunum oc hirðmonnum með hirð alla at fækia norðr til Niðarofar till hins hælga Olafs konongs. til vmraða við erchibyskop oc nefni huer byskop oc sinu byskopsðæmi .rij. hina vitrazfto men oc se a for komner innan þeff manadar er þeir fpyria frafal konongs. (NgL II, 27).*

king's heir with these words: "The title of king, which God gives to you, which you are born to and to which you have been taken by the will of the people and according to the law of Saint King Olav, I give to you and name the king's heir with the name .N. on God's behalf and on behalf of those who are subject to your rule, with the honor and authority which pertains to the whole of Norway and its tributary lands. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen."⁶⁵⁰

We saw earlier that during the first half of the 13th century, the cult of St Olav was central in the Church's effort to appropriate the *konungstekja*. Royal control over the ritual was achieved by cutting out the symbols the Church had introduced in order to stress its ascendancy over the election. These concerned first of all St Olav.

There are several references to the saint in the chapters dedicated to the ritual of the *konungstekja*. For instance, when the new king is seated in the church, several chants are to be sung, among them the *De sancto Oluaao*. The new king will also pray to God's mercy, the saint and Virgin Mary.⁶⁵¹ Finally the king is said to receive his title from the people and after *hins hællga Olafs konongs*, "the law of the holy King Olav." To a large extent however, the law removes almost all explicit references to the Cult of St Olav from the ritual. First, there are no allusions to the relics of St Olav, neither as an element of processions or in the pledging of oaths. The law rightly refers to a procession at

650 Nu skal til þæss sæigia með hærri skipan þan skal til konongs taka er guð hæfir os gefit til forstiora oc hærra með sinni miskun oc æftir rettom ærfdum til sins foður arfs skipat. Hællzt skyllði þetta vera at hatiðis ðæigi eða. a. ðrottens ðæigi ef æigi banna æinar huæirar nauðsyniar. J. þan tima sem hæster men ero saman komner. skal vera þing stæfnt eftir forne siðvæiniu. [...] A þeim ðæigi sem þing skal vera. skal blasa fyrst vm morgenen miok arla ollu folke til þings oc þa skal oll hirð hærlæðazt oc buazt sem sòmølegazt huæc æftir sinum fongum. þa skal konongs æfni lata syngia eða lesa ser messo de spiritu sancto med þæssom collectum. Deus in the sperancium fortitudo. De. domina. De. sancto Olauo. De omnibus sanctis. Siðan eftir messona skal konongs æfni ganga til alteris oc biðia ser miskunnar við guð af ollu hiarta með arnaðar orðe hinnar hælgu mariu oc hins hælga Olafs konongs. Taka siðan blæzan af biskupi með knefalle. En eftir þæt skal bera fram hinn hælga kross oc aðra hælga ðomæ. Her æftir skal processio fylgia hinum hællga krosse með oðrum hælgum ðomum. [...] Þegar sem þing er sætt oc siðat. þa skal sa sem tigulegaztær fææstz til huart sem er lærðrmaðer eða læikmaðer. læggia .a. konongs æfni. konongs nafn með þæssom orðom. Onongs namn þat sem guð leer þeer oc þu ert til komenn oc af landz folkenu til tækinn æftir lagum hins hællga Olafs konongs. lægg ek a. þik oc næfni konongs æfni. a. nafn. N. af guds hallfu. oc allra þæira sem vniðir þitt vallð ero skipaðer með þæiri sòmð oc stior sem þui. a. at fyllgia. ivir ollum Norege oc hans skattlonðum. J. nafne foður oc sunar oc hæilags andæ. amen. (NgL II, 393–394).

651 Hsk, Ch. 2.

the beginning of the ritual when the new king leaves the church to reach the place of the assembly, but gives no explicit indication on whose relics are involved. Second, the relics of the saint are absent from the pledging of oath. In the sagas, the new king used to pledge an oath on the relics of the saints. In the *Hirðskrá* the king does not pledge an oath, but make a promise (§. 3). What is remarkable here is the absence of relics from the king's oath. On the contrary, and in accordance with earlier custom, in the following chapter dedicated to the oaths of the dukes and earls (§. 4), the law indicates that they swear with *honð a þæssa hællga ðoma*, "my hand on these holy relics." The oath of lendmen (§. 8) and *hirðstjorene* (§. 9) is more specific and refers to the Bible; *þes leg et honð a hælga bok*, "with my hand on this holy book." Farmers (§. 10), swear their oath with *et honð a hælga ðoma*, "a hand on relics."

The absence of any explicit references to the relics of Nidaros Cathedral greatly weakened the connection which the Church had established between Nidaros/*Eyraving* and the ritual of *konungstekja*. This connection was further impaired by lack of any reference to any specific *þing*. Indeed, in the description of the ritual, its location clearly remains open: The choice of the location is in contradiction with ideas of centralizing the ritual of succession at one *þing* and allows the repetition of the ritual at different regional assemblies. What is remarkable here is that whereas earlier laws were clear and explicit, Magnus's law of succession cultivates uncertainty as to its location.

One could object that as the description of the ritual followed the regulations of inheritance where Nidaros was explicitly referred to, the *Eyraving* was obviously the *þing* for the *konungstekja*. It appears however that several manuscripts only mention the description of the *konungstekja* independently of the rules of inheritance. This is the case for our oldest manuscript, a manuscript of the *Hirðskrá*, AM 322 fol, dating from 1300.⁶⁵²

By the beginning of the 1270s, Nidaros thus ceased to be central to the ritual of *konungstekja*. The law of succession of 1273 and the designation of King Eirik and Duke Håkon the same year had kept the northern town out of the *konungstekja*. In a general manner, the connection between royal succession and Nidaros was further enfeebled in the concordats of 1273 and 1277.

Crown Sacrifice: The Concordats of 1273 and 1277

During the 1270s, the last great confrontation developed between the Norwegian clergy and the Norwegian kings. Again the role of Nidaros in the ritual successions was a major power issue.

⁶⁵² Imsen 2000, 9–23.

Since the end of the civil war, the Norwegian monarchy had experienced constant development. The royal dynasty was now firmly anchored, and for the first time in a century a king (Magnus the Lawmender) had succeeded his predecessor (Håkon Håkonsson) without opposition. In the 1260s and early 1270s, Norwegian monarchs engaged in intense legislative activity and established the kingship as the central legal authority in the kingdom. For a long time, the Church had passively assisted the growth of royal power. In a general manner the consolidation of royal power was to the Church's liking as it created favorable conditions for its development. Yet the royal laws increasingly infringed upon its field of jurisdiction. The election of Jon Raude in October 1267 placed at the head of the archbishopric of Nidaros an inflexible man who was highly concerned with re-establishing the Church's authority with respect to the crown. In collaboration with the king, Archbishop Jon strove to clarify the jurisdictional frontiers between lay and clerical power, leading to the concordats of Bergen (1273) and of Tønsberg (1277).

Modern historiography has traditionally focused on the jurisdictional and legal issues of the conflict, such as patronage rights, the rights to judge clerical affairs, taxes and military exemptions.⁶⁵³ It has however overlooked the conflict's ritualistic issues. In the struggle for power and influence, control over the rituals of succession was again at stake. Archbishop Jon claimed the privileges and rights granted by Magnus Erlingsson in 1163. An essential matter of these rights concerned Church's control over royal succession and in particular the disposition which ascribed Nidaros a privileged role: the offering of the crown to the altar of St Olav. Under the prelatry of Archbishop Eystein (1158–1188), the Church had obtained the promise from King Magnus Erlingsson to place his crown on the altar of Nidaros Cathedral as a sign of the crown's submission to the Norwegian Church.⁶⁵⁴ Crown sacrifice strengthened the role of Nidaros in the process of royal succession (see I, 4). After nearly one hundred years, the crown offering to St Olav was again an issue.

In the summer of 1273, the king and the Church met in Bergen to jointly redefine their respective prerogatives and rights. The negotiations were arduous and although the king gave way on many jurisdictional and economic matters, Archbishop Jon Raude ruined everything by his excess of zeal.⁶⁵⁵ On his return from Lyon, where he was to submit the treaty to papal confirmation, Jon

653 Halvdan Koht. 1916. "Sættargjerda I Tunsberg 1277." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 16: 184–197; Jens Arup Seip. 1942. *Sættargjerdene I Tunsberg og kirkens jurisdiksjon*. Oslo; Haug 2003, 91–93.

654 *NgL* II, 442–444.

655 Haug 2003, 89.

added a new condition in the document on his own initiative. If the king were to break the agreement, the dispositions about crown offering and royal election were to be applied. The maneuver failed and only led to a bitter rift in the discussions.

We do not have the original text of this first agreement, but by way of introduction the text of the concordat of 1277 gives a short summary of the subjects of disagreement between the Norwegian Church and the kingship. The main bulk of dispositions concerns jurisdictional rights, tax exemptions and privileges of the Church. However, on that occasion, Archbishop Jon demanded that the king grant him the privilege to offer his crown to the altar of St Olaf and to become his vassal. The principle of election was a further major claim of Jon's. Jon referred to King Magnus Erlingsson, who granted that Norway's kings should be elected and that the archbishop and the bishops in the election should have special votes above those of the other electors.⁶⁵⁶

...Archbishop of Nidaros [claims] that also, probably due to lack of use, some Church privileges had been curtailed, in particular, the privilege granted by Magnus, known as Norway's king, notably that part of the privilege which holds that the aforementioned Magnus promised himself and his kingdom to the sacred Olav, king and martyr, and as a sign of subjection ordered that after his and everyone his successors' death the crown should be surrendered to the aforementioned Martyr in the cathedral church.⁶⁵⁷

The text reflects the Church's demands of 1273 concerning royal elections and the offering of the royal crown to Nidaros. The document also states the king's opinion on the subjects.

...the aforementioned King claimed that he had just arguments to answer the aforementioned articles and opposing the archbishop's demand, said he would take a legal action before a fair judge, especially with regard to

656 *NgL* II, 457.

657 *In super quod priuilegiis ecclesie sue quibusdam et specialiter priuilegio Magni cuiusdam ut dicebatur regis Norvegie derogatum fuerat ut creditur non utendo maxime in e aparte priuilegij qua continebatur quod prefatue Magnús deuouit se et regnum suum beato Olawo regi et martyri et in signum subiectionis precepit coronam post decessum suum et omnium in regnum sibi succedencium offerri prefato martyri in ecclesia cathedrali* (*NgL* II, 462).

the election, the submission and crown offering, which was not likely to be proven that the Nidaros Church had been in possession of.⁶⁵⁸

The Church's claims were met with the king's request for written proof. In summer 1277, Archbishop Jon and King Magnus the Lawmender met again in Tønsberg and this time reached an agreement in which the Church abandoned its claims over royal succession.

The aforementioned archbishop [...] renounces every right – if he had or might have any – in regard to the aforementioned election of the king, submission or crown sacrifice⁶⁵⁹

The treaty was a great success for the crown, which saw the archbishop accepting the last Law of Succession and through this renouncing major involvement in the process of royal succession. Jon obtained however that when an election was held in the absence of legal successor, the clergy would have “the primary and most important votes among the nation's other noble and wise electors.”⁶⁶⁰

On several occasions, the Church had requested kings to swear the coronation oath of Magnus Erlingsson, but as far as we can judge the claims of crown offering had never been a bargaining object before. Indeed, relinquishing the crown offering was a significant and probably definitive blow to the archbishops' ambitions to bind the process of royal coronation to Nidaros. The position of Nidaros was also weakened in the concession obtained by Jon: Although the clergy was granted greater influence in the election of a new king, there is no reference to Nidaros as the location for the vote. This element is quite remarkable as dispositions concerned with royal elections traditionally were tightly bound to the need to “seek north to the town of Olav.”⁶⁶¹ The treaty was by no means a catastrophe for the Church, confirming extensive jurisdictional rights

658 *Ad respondendum uero articulis supra dictis ac contra petitionem archiepiscopi supradictus dominus rex illustris sufficienter asseruit se habere rationes si super hijs coram iusto iudice duceret contendendum et maxime contra electionem subiectioni et oblacionem corone de quibus uix uel nunquam posset probari ecclesiam nidrosiensem (NgL II, 462–463).*

659 *Pater archiepiscopus [...] renunciavit [...] in predicta electione regum subiectione seu oblacione corone (NgL II, 463).*

660 *Si uero nullus inueniatur successor iure hereditario archiepiscopus et episcopi inter ceteros nobiliores et discreiores regni electores in electione tantum modo uoces primas et potissimas optineant (Ibid.).*

661 *At sækia norðr til hins helga Olafs konongs (NgL I, 4).*

and earlier privileges, as well as granting important tax exemptions.⁶⁶² Yet with the concordat of Tønsberg, the kingship established its ascendancy over rituals of succession, which long had been the private turf of the Church, by removing Nidaros from royal succession regulations. Nearly a century after his death, Archbishop Eystein's plan to raise Nidaros to the place where kings were made was seriously damaged.

At the turn of the 13th century, the ritual of the *konungstekja* took place in a great variety of locations. The sources diverge in their account of the hailing and crowning of King Håkon v Magnusson in 1299. If we believe the *Laurentius saga* (c. 1350), Nidaros may have regained its privileged place for Duke Håkon was hailed at the *Eyraping* and crowned in Christ Church.⁶⁶³ However, annals tell another story which has found favor with scholars.⁶⁶⁴ According to the Icelandic annals, Duke Håkon and Queen Euphemia were crowned on 1 November 1299.⁶⁶⁵ At that time the Duke was most probably in Oslo as he issued a charter on 16 October and another one on 24 November.⁶⁶⁶ Of course, Håkon could have travelled to Nidaros and back in the meantime. Moreover, the presence of the duke was not necessary for issuing a charter, in particular in view of the charter's humble nature. We cannot discard the possibility that Håkon was crowned twice at both places. However, information about Håkon's successors clearly testifies to Norwegian kings' lack of fidelity to the traditional *konungstekja* locations. Magnus Eriksson, King of Sweden and Norway, was acclaimed King of Norway at the *Haugaping* in Tønsberg in August 1319 and crowned King of Sweden, Norway and Skåne in Stockholm in July 1336.⁶⁶⁷ His heir, Håkon vi Magnusson, was hailed king at an assembly at Båhus Castle on the Göta River in 1344.⁶⁶⁸ Thus the location of the *konungstekja* remained flexible.

The Means of Ritual Control

Norwegian kings achieved control over rituals and ceremonies of kingship by appropriating the *loci* they were staged. As we have seen, this led the crown to dispute the supremacy of Nidaros and correspondingly to enhance the position of Bergen. In this chapter we will show that the Norwegian kingship took developed

662 Haug 2003, 51–82.

663 “The title of king was given to Håkon his brother, who was crowned with the hallowing of a king in Trondhjem by Archbishop Jörund.[...] No man might go out from Eyri and on to Christ Church except with eider-down robes, costly stuff, and canopy” (*Lsb*, 22).

664 Helle 1964, 187; Helle 1972, 176–177.

665 *IA*, 386.

666 Respectively, *NgL* III nr. 12 and *DN* II nr. 55.

667 Blom 1992, 118–122.

668 Bagge 2010a, 360 ff; Blom 1992, 375 ff.

another device to increase its ascendancy over the staging of kingmaking rituals. This was the mobilization of actors in kingmaking and their performance in its staging: the kings and the *hirð*. Finally, we will also show that this enterprise of control was also sustained by propagandist activity.

It is here again necessary to underscore the fact that the growing involvement of the kingship in the staging of the ritual was not meant to eliminate the clergy's participation in the execution of the religious rituals. The crown needed the Church and the religious legitimacy it alone could grant. In its competition with the Norwegian Church, the Norwegian kingship merely sought to weaken the instrumentalization of the rituals by the bishops and to confine the clergy to their role as performers.

The King

The *konungstekja* was a ritual that made kings. It is thus quite natural that they were central figures in its staging. First, the candidate to the royal title was the chief participant in the processions that lead to and from the *þings*. In spatial terms, he was at the center of the cortege, surrounded by his *hirð*. During the ritual at the *þing* the candidate was also at the center of the staging; he received the title of king and swore an oath on relics to his subjects. In return, he also received their oaths. Visually, the centrality of the king was enhanced through the throne. The *Hirðskrá* is one of the few extant sources providing detailed information about the ceremonial role of the high-seat. It clearly establishes that when the royal heir came to the *þing*, he would seat on a step in front of the highest seat.⁶⁶⁹ Once he has received his title, the bishops, lendmen, *hirðstjorene* and the lagmen will raise him onto the throne.⁶⁷⁰ The elevation of the candidate to the royal office was thus translated visually in the king's physical elevation over the assembly.

But prospective kings were not the only ones to play a role in the staging of the ritual; as the ritual was used to associate royal heirs during the sovereign's lifetime, ruling kings increasingly became central actors in the *konungstekja*. Thus kings tended to monopolize the initiative to summon the assembly of the *konungstekja* for the acclamation of their heirs. The role of kings in the summoning of the *þing* is difficult to assess prior to 1240. For the *konungstekja* of King Hákon Hákonsson in 1217 at the *Eyrþing*, *Gulaping* and *Haugaping*, the *Hákonar saga* only states that "the horns were blown for the thing" or that "the Hauga-Thing was summoned."⁶⁷¹ For the acclamation at the *Eyrþing*, Sturla

669 *Hsk*, Ch. 5. For a precise simulation of the staging surrounding the high-seat see Lawrence G. Berge. 1968. *Hirðskrá 1–37, A translation with notes*. University of Wisconsin: 88–89.

670 *Hsk*, Ch. 5.

671 *uar blafit til þings* (*HsH*, Ch. 23), *Sjðdann var stefnt Hauga-þinn* (*HsH*, Ch. 28).

notes that “the horns were blown in the old fashion,” without us possessing any clear knowledge of what this “old fashion” was and *a fortiori* whether it concerned the king or not.⁶⁷² Neither do we know who summoned the *konungstekja* of Duke Skule.⁶⁷³

From 1240 onwards however, the act of summoning the *þing* is clearly associated with the ruling king. Håkon the Young received his kingly title at the *Eyraping*, which had been summoned by his father.⁶⁷⁴ When Magnus was acclaimed in Denmark in 1257, the saga notes it was King Håkon who organized the assembly.⁶⁷⁵ Finally, when King Magnus gave the title of king and duke to his sons in 1273, *Magnúss saga Lagabætiss* suggests that the *þing* was organized at the king’s instigation.⁶⁷⁶ At the *Eyraping* in 1275, King Magnus also summoned the *þing* which was to confirm the princely ranks of his heirs.⁶⁷⁷

Ruling kings were also increasingly decisive in the specific rite of bestowing the title of king. Originally the rite was performed by a farmer. In 1217, King Håkon received his title from Skervald of Gaulardale at the *Eyraping*.⁶⁷⁸ However the rite was gradually appropriated by the elite. In 1240 it was a monk, Einar Butterback, who gave Håkon the Young the royal title.⁶⁷⁹ In 1257, this role went to the same person, who this time officiated as archbishop.⁶⁸⁰ In 1273 then it was King Magnus who, despite the archbishop’s presence, gave the titles to his sons.⁶⁸¹ Two years later it was also King Magnus who played a lead role when his sons’ titles of king and duke were announced at the *Eyraping*.⁶⁸² The *Hirðskrá* is less categorical and refers to a designator of ecclesiastic and lay origin:

As soon as the *þing* is convened and in session the noblest person available regardless of whether he is a cleric or a layman shall confer upon the prospective king the title of king⁶⁸³

672 *Var þa Blaasid epter fornre sidveniu* (HsH, Ch. 17).

673 HsH, Ch. 199.

674 HsH, Ch. 223.

675 HsH, Ch. 292.

676 *ML s*, 163.

677 *Gsk*, 332.

678 HsH, Ch. 17.

679 HsH, Ch. 223.

680 HsH, Ch. 292.

681 *ML s*, 163.

682 *Gsk*, 332.

683 *Þegar sem þing er sætt oc siðat. þa skal sa sem tigulegaztær fææsztt til huart sem er lærð-maðær eða læikmaðær. læggja .a. konongs æfni. konongs nafn* (Hsk, Ch. 5).

Although the ordinance is unclear on the picture of royal monopolization, the function was clearly opened up to the nobility. Furthermore, the very criteria for the choice of the designator, *tigulegaztær fææsz*, “the noblest person available,” points towards hierarchical values rather than religious ones.⁶⁸⁴ The person will be chosen in view of his rank and his dignity, not by religious standards like piety and virtue as was the case in the law of succession of 1163.⁶⁸⁵ This terminology clearly favored the king, who was at the top of the social pyramid, and eminently justified the privileged role of kings in the designation of royal heirs.

The ritual of *konungstekja* also provided opportunities for public speeches people of a range of backgrounds, which the kings in particular made use for their political communication. Unlike *Sverris saga*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* contains fewer transcriptions of speeches, which prevents us from knowing the exact content of most orations. No royal speeches are mentioned during the seven successive acclamations of King Hákon Hákonsson in 1217. There was no ruling king at the time and King Hákon was probably too young to hold one. However, it is significant that at the *þing* in Bergen it was a representative for the assembly and the leader of the *hirð*, Dagfinn Bondi, who gave an oration.⁶⁸⁶ In 1240, King Hákon Hákonsson gave lengthy orations at each acclamation of his son Hákon the Young.⁶⁸⁷ Each of these speeches addressed several important matters, illustrating kings’ use of assemblies as political rostra for their policies. In the context of Earl Skule’s betrayal, King Hakon complained about the disloyalty of his subjects, issuing a veiled threat against them.⁶⁸⁸ The speech thus was meant as a warning to the earl’s supporters. A few weeks later during the subsequent acclamation in Bergen, the king spoke to gather support for his cause and to threaten those who refused to follow him with harsh punishment.⁶⁸⁹ The lack of detailed description for the speeches made during the designation of Magnus’s sons in the summer of 1273 is greatly prejudicial. Vigleik, leader of the *hirð*, Archbishop Jon and King Magnus held speeches which, except for the prelate’s, remain unknown to us. With a bit imagination though, we can tentatively assume that Magnus’s speech, dealt with the designation of his sons and exalted dynastic continuity.⁶⁹⁰

684 “*tiguligr*” means honorable and stately, and clearly refers to social status. (*Norrøn ordbok*, Det Norske Samlaget 2008 (5 ed.): 633).

685 See the discussion about idoneity in, Tobiassen 1964, 228 ff.

686 *HsH*, Ch. 23.

687 *HsH*, Chs. 223 and 225.

688 *HsH*, Ch. 223.

689 *HsH*, Ch. 225.

690 *ML s*, 163.

Finally, ruling kings were not only part of the staging; they also were strongly involved in the very organization of the event. A pre-meeting headed by the king was arranged prior to the *thing* to review the role of each participant and the ritual procedure. King Magnus's involvement is all too clear in 1273:

King Magnus held a meeting of the hird...he then declared also to his men those customs which he wished them to keep as to bearing arms and other things. [...] After that a Thing was held in Christ Church yard and so arrayed as the king had told them before at the meeting.⁶⁹¹

The *Hirðskrá* makes clear reference to the necessity of such a meeting. It explains its role in the decisive negotiations between the king and the *hirð* about their respective rights and duties. But it also emphasizes the meeting's function in the organization of the *hirð*'s procession.⁶⁹² The text also refers to the king's role in the summoning of the assembly.

The king's role in the *konungstekja* thus appears to have been strengthened as the ritual's primary function as an institution that elected a candidate to the throne shifted to a ceremony sanctioning the association of an heir to the kingship. Whereas in its traditional form the *konungstekja* was organized after the death of a king, with the acclamation of Håkon the Young in 1240 the ritual was performed during the ruling king's lifetime, transforming the *konungstekja* into a strong symbol of hereditary succession. Finally, the growing involvement of kings came at the expense of other actors, first of all of the popular representatives who early in the 13th century ceased to fill an active function in the ritual. Although the ritual kept its religious character, the clergy also lost ground in the staging.

The growing involvement of kings in the staging of rituals of kingship is also conspicuous during the coronation of King Magnus the Lawmender in 1261. Despite Sturla's reluctance to describe religious ceremonials, he underlines the fact that both kings went to the altar and that it was King Håkon together with the bishops who handed the sword, the symbol of power, to his son Magnus.⁶⁹³ In a similar fashion, the account of King Håkon's dialogue with his son when the latter was seated on the throne after receiving the crown stresses Håkon's omnipresence in the ceremony.⁶⁹⁴ This royal appropriation of the religious

691 *hafði Magnús konúgr hirðstefnu...Skírði hann þá ok sínum mönnum um þá siðsemð, sem hann vildi at þeir hefðu, um våpnaburð ok aðra hluti. [...]En eptir þat var þing sett í Kristskirkjugarði, ok svá skipat sem konúnggrinn sagði fyrir á fundinum. (ML s, 163).*

692 *Hsk*, Ch. 5.

693 *HsH*, Ch. 310.

694 *Ibid.*

ceremony clearly emphasized the king's control over the coronation at the cost of the clergy.

The *Hirð*

As we have seen above, from the mid-13th century the *hirð* was to take a greater and active part in the communication of the kings (see III, 5). Much of the king's energy in the preparation of the great happenings that were crownings, marriages and *konungstekja*, was thus devoted to securing magnates' and the *hirð*'s attendance. In 1247, King Håkon's first act after receiving message of the pope's decision to send a cardinal to crown him was to summon his liegemen and the *hirð* to Bergen.⁶⁹⁵ The 13th century laws of succession compel all members of the *hirð* to attend the ritual of *konungstekja*, considering any unjustified absence to constitute treason.⁶⁹⁶ The chief reason for this was that the lay aristocracy and in particular the *hirð* fulfilled a decisive function in the staging of rituals, contributing to consolidate the kingship's control.

The place ascribed to the *hirð* in the staging of the ritual of *konungstekja* is an important element that clearly underlines its re-appropriation by the crown.

In the Law of Succession of 1260, the composition of the assembly that was to acclaim the king was copied almost word for word from the law of 1163. Yet there were notable differences which had major political consequences. First, the 1260 law reorganized the ritual of the *konungstekja* on the model of the general assembly that was referred to in 1163. The new law reproduced the system of representatives in summoning members of the clergy, of the *hirð*, and of the people through twelve men from each district. The first occurrence of the influence of the law of 1163 in the *konungstekja* is in 1177 when Sverre summoned the *Eyrþing* in order to be hailed king, and convoked *.xii. menn or hverio fylki þeira .viii. er fyrir inan Agða-nes ero*, "twelve men by name from each of the eight shires that lie within Agdaness."⁶⁹⁷ Although this is hardly conclusive evidence of a connection with the law, as the principles of representativeness probably were already established at regional *þings*, it still remains the first reference to it at a kingmaking. In the following century, the principle of representative participation during the *konungstekja* would become definitively accepted.

If the nature of the elective collegium was kept close to the original, the principle that bishops were to have the last word in case of disagreement disappeared. In the new law it was the members of the elite of the *hirð*

695 *HsH*, Ch. 248.

696 Law of succession of 1260 (*NgL* II, 308); Law of succession of 1273 (*NgL* II, 25–28).

697 *SvS*, Ch. 16.

(*hirðstjorene*) who were to name the twelve good men from each region and not the bishops, like in the law of 1163. This detail deprived the Church of a great deal of its influence in the election of kings and placed greater power in the hand of the king's vassals.⁶⁹⁸

The *konungstekja* of 1273, which saw Magnus's heirs receiving their royal and ducal titles respectively, illustrates the growing role of the *hirð* in the ritual. The saga systematically lays emphasis on the role played by the king, his heirs and their liegemen. Thus the ritual is preceded by a meeting where the king announces his intentions to the *hirð*. It also becomes clear that the *hirð* was intimately associated with the staging of the ceremony. During a pre-meeting, the king gave clear indications about the *hirð*'s arrangement for the procession: "He then declared also to his men those customs which he wished them to keep as to bearing arms and other things."⁶⁹⁹ After having attended different offices at the church, the *þing* assembly was set up and inaugurated by speeches. These were well-nigh monopolized by the king and his liegemen. Through its representative, Constable Vigleik, the *hirð* was given the privilege to speak first. The king also held a speech which concluded with his giving the titles of king and duke to his sons. Archbishop Jon was also part of the ritual, but he is only mentioned for his oration and not in any other parts of process. Furthermore, if we assign significance to the chronological succession of orators, it appears that Jon's contribution was relegated to after that of the *hirð*. Even more compelling is that Jon was not involved in the designation of Eirik and Hákon at all, which remained the prerogative of the king alone.

The increasing involvement of the *hirð* in the *konungstekja* is even more conspicuous in the Law of Succession of 1273. The law provides the first detailed description of the staging of the *konungstekja*. It was a religious ritual in which the liturgy played a central role. The future king participated in the Mass and was conducted to the *þing* in a procession led by relics. The ritual was interspersed with religious chants at regular intervals and reciprocal oaths were made on relics.

The king's liegemen were closely associated with the ritual. First, the *hirð* was part of the cortege that accompanied the king to the place of the *þing*. This cortege was submitted to a thorough preparation. A meeting was organized specially before the ritual in order to discuss "how the entire hird shall prepare themselves in the most becoming manner for the thing in order that their

698 This view has been most clearly stressed by Schreiner (1946, 88–104). See also Bagge 2010a, 329–335.

699 *Skírði hann þá ok sínun mönnum um þá siðsemð, sem hann vildi at þeir hefðu, um vâpnaburð ok aðra hluti. (ML s, 162).*

entire deportment might be as stately as possible.”⁷⁰⁰ The *hirð*’s cortege was also meant to display great magnificence in its clothing and hierarchical arrangement, as “the entire Hird shall take on full battle dress and prepare themselves as honorably as possible, each according to his rank.”⁷⁰¹ During the *konungstekja* the *hirð* was thus used for representation of the crown exactly in the same manner as described in the *Konungs Skuggsía*. Through its physical appearance, its organization and display in the cortege, the *hirð* assisted the king and not only contributed to the magnificence of the ritual in general, but to the prestige of the king in particular.

The *konungstekja* was not only a ritual used to make kings. It also was a central arena of communication between the king and his liegemen. This centrality becomes all the more clear when one considers that the precise regulation of the ritual was included in the *Hirðskrá*, the book of the *hirð*. As the ritual both placed a new king at the head of the kingdom and gave the *hirð* a new leader, the relationship – which was a personal one between the king and the *hirð* – needed to be redefined. The election of the king provided a fresh start to this relationship. New duties and exigencies could be required of both parties. Old arrangements also needed to be confirmed. In a similar way as the ceremony of coronation which was preceded by intense negotiations between the Church and the king, the ritual of the *konungstekja* gave rise to the striking of a bargain with the *hirð*.

One of the first elements of the *konungstekja* concerns the hold of a meeting, *hirðstæfna*, with the king and the *hirð* before the ritual. During this meeting, the king and the *hirð* discussed their respective rights and duties. During the negotiations the king could make promises of promotions and new charges in the “new” *hirð*. The whole remained at the level of mutual promises, but an agreement needed to be reached in order for the king to summon the *þing*. The real sealing of the bargain occurred after the election. *Hirðskrá* says that a day after the ritual, a new meeting was to be held which was a direct continuation of the meeting preceding the *konungstekja*. The newly legitimized king received the homage of the *hirð* and confirmed the privileges and promises he had made previously.

On the following day the king shall have the horn sounded, summoning all of the liegemen to a conference. All of the men shall at that time pledge their allegiance and swear oaths, but none of those who previously were liegemen shall do a second time. Neither barons nor the pages

700 *Síðan skal um þat røða huæiria læið með mestom sòmðom oll hirð skal sik til þings bua. at sem virdulegatz se oll þeira meðfærð. (Hsk, Ch. 5).*

701 *oc þa skal oll hirð hærlæðazt oc buazt sem sòmølegazt huær æftir sinum fongum (Ibid.).*

shall receive their titles in any other manner than that whereby they all become the king's oath-bound sword-takers. Each of them, however, shall have their titles in accordance with the same rank.⁷⁰²

The encounter followed a ceremonial very close to the feudal ceremony of homage in Western Europe. The vassals of the king swore an oath of fealty and the use of the word *sverðstakar* indicates that during the ceremony the king rested his sword on their head and shoulders. The king's vassals were also called *handgengnir menn*, "the king's 'hand men,'" which referred to the ceremony in which the vassal placed his hands between the king's own hands.⁷⁰³

From the mid-13th century onwards, the royal *hirð* was increasingly associated with the ritual of the *konungstekja*. The laws of succession and the regulation of the ritual in 1273 sanctioned its direct involvement in the political process and its decision-making procedures. These political prerogatives only involved the upper strata of the *hirð*, its elite. The *hirð*'s participation as group was more conspicuous as a means of visual representation. Its contribution to the processions and cortege, which were arranged around the ritual, grew in size and complexity throughout the period examined. Through their presence and martial organization, the king's liegemen assisted their future lord and enhanced the prestige of the ritual.

The growing presence of the *hirð* was beneficial to the crown, which was thus able to counterbalance the omnipresence of the clergy in the *konungstekja*. It is difficult to accurately interpret this instrumentalization of the aristocracy, for the *hirð*'s participation of the in the kingmaking ritual may also indicate the aristocracy's growing influence upon the political landscape of 13th-century Norway, in which case the presence of the *hirð* would simply manifest its political weight.

As previously shown, the *hirð* was closely involved in every stage of King Håkon Håkonsson's coronation in 1247. In addition to their contribution to the organizing of the event, they were a major element of the processions organized before the ceremony (the welcome of Cardinal William of Sabina, processions

702 *Hinn nesta dag æftir skal konongr lata blasa til tals ollum handgengnum monnum. þa skulu aller menn gera kononge tryglæik oc vinna æiða. En aller þeir sem aðr varo handgengnir skulu eicki annatsinni huarki lændir mæn eða skutilsuæinar taka með oðrum hætte sinar nafnbøtar nema gerazt aller suerðtakarar konongs med æiði. hafe þo huær sinar nafnbøtar æftir jomnum sölmdum.* (Hsk, Ch. 6).

703 The chapter bears the title *Her eftir seigir huæssv handgengnir men skulu a nyungu taka nafnbotr sinar þeir sem aðær varo handgengnir*, «Here is told how the king's hand men shall take their privileges again, those who were already the king's hand men». (Hsk, Ch. 11).

between the king's palace and the coronation church). They also participated in the crowning ceremony during the ritual of the oath. Finally, through their presence and positioning at the post-coronation banquets, the *hirð* contributed to enhance royal supremacy (see III, 7). Similarly, during the marriage and crowning of Magnus in 1261 in Bergen, the *hirð* was part of the cortege that welcomed Magnus' future wife to the town.⁷⁰⁴

The king's retainers also were strongly involved in the funerals of King Håkon Håkonsson in Kirkwall in winter 1263 and in Bergen at Easter 1264. They organized the vigil of Håkon's burial in St Magnus' Cathedral until his translation to Bergen.⁷⁰⁵ Once in Norway, the *hirð* joined the solemn procession bearing King Håkon to Christ Church.⁷⁰⁶ These passages from the *Hákonar saga* illustrate the *hirð*'s constant duty to accompany their king both during his lifetime and in death.

The Author's Pen

The enterprise of control over rituals of kingship also developed distant from the coronation and funerary churches and from the assembly of the *þing*. As Buc has argued, past rituals have come to us through the texts of long dead authors, which are colored by the fantasies, culture and even political inclinations. Indeed, in his view texts depicting "rituals" were "instruments of power" that sought to directly impact upon the present.⁷⁰⁷ Descriptions of past ceremonies were not subject to constraints of objectivity, but rather served as an expression of how they should have happened and how they should be remembered.⁷⁰⁸

Indeed, the pen of Sturla Þórðarson appears to have played a role in the appropriation of rituals by the Norwegian kings. We have noted the characteristic lack of interest of the *Hákonar saga*'s author in the religious ceremonies of coronations and funerals. In spite of the fact that these ceremonies included numerous and complex rites of high symbolic value, Sturla never dedicated more than a sentence to them.⁷⁰⁹

In comparison, the author was rather more forthcoming with the descriptions of the worldly phases in which the kings and their supporters played a

704 *HsH*, Ch. 308.

705 *HsH*, Ch. 330.

706 *Ibid.*

707 Buc 2001, 259.

708 Koziol 1992, 116–118.

709 For the crowing of 1247 (*HsH*, Ch. 254), of 1261 (*HsH*, Ch. 310) and for the burial of 1263 (*HsH*, Ch. 331).

greater role (processions, banquets and festivities). Thus the dozen words used for the description of religious ceremonies appear very few compared with the 200 words accounting for the seating arrangements in 1247 and with the 130 words used for the account of the *hirð*'s procession in 1261. Moreover, the example of the reception of the coronation sword during King Magnus's coronation that same year (see III, 7) shows that when the author allowed himself to elaborate on details about the royal coronation liturgy, this was done to specifically enhance the king's performance. This phenomenon may well have been purposeful and an element of pro-royalist propaganda. The imbalance in the description of ceremonies and rituals downplayed the bishops' authority and emphasized the power of kings in presenting the staging of ceremonies under royal premises to the saga's audience.

Thus the appropriation of rituals and ceremonies of kingship by Norwegian kings also had implications for the context of their literary representation. In this enterprise, the kings were able to rely on the support of their intellectuals. The *Hákonar saga* demonstrates that royal patronage could lead authors to leave out subtle components from their narrative of solemnities while putting others in high relief as part of the glorification of their patrons.

8 The Chancery and Administrative Literacy

It is no coincidence that we are concluding our study of royal communication with an examination of the chancery, diplomatics and charter production. In many respects, the development of the royal chancery epitomizes the development of written communication and in particular its control by the Norwegian kings, as it represents the institutionalization of the written word in the service of royal government.

The royal chancery in the High Middle Ages was the institution in charge of writing, editing, sending and archiving official letters and charters issued and received by the kings.⁷¹⁰ It was lead by the chancellor. He could write documents himself and/or control the redactions of his subalterns, but his main responsibility was to keep the royal seal, which was used to sign and authenticate documents' royal origin.⁷¹¹

The high medieval chancery enjoys a special place in the scholarship of medieval state-making. Its degree of organizational sophistication and the

710 Guyotjeannin 1993, 223 ff; "Kansli," by Johan Agerholt, *KLNM* Vol. VIII: 241–243; "Kanzlei, Kanzler" in *Lexicon des Mittelalters*, Vol. IV: 910–025.

711 Guyotjeannin 1993, 90–92.

volume of its production are readily used as markers of state-development.⁷¹² The chancery indicates the level of centralization of political power and the extent of its prerogatives. Beyond its administrative dimension, the royal chancery was the organ of state communication *par excellence*. It enabled the kings not only to “communicate” information and orders to their subjects through written documents throughout their realms, but also to consolidate their authority. In particular, royal letters and charters were built on different on a set of formulas which, on various levels, were suitable for conveying political ideas and royal ideology, thus becoming a natural frame for royal propaganda.⁷¹³

In one of the preceding chapters we saw how limited the diplomatic production of the Norwegian kings was in the 12th century and how extensive the Church’s involvement was. Over the course of the 13th century and in particular in the early 14th century, the Norwegian kings were to develop and strengthen their control over the chancery and affirm charters and letters as privileged means of expression of royal power.

Exploring the Norwegian royal chancery and its diplomatic production in the 13th century is somewhat like walking on quicksand. Our knowledge is extremely limited and we do not have any solid ground from which to draw firm conclusions. During the period examined, the corpus of letters extant is very limited and the saga literature seldom mentions the royal chancery. Nevertheless, we do have a significant amount of documents – in particular from the last third of the century onwards – and references in the saga material proving that kings did produce letters and charters on a significant level. We also have few scattered mentions of chancellors or agents officiating as such in the sagas.⁷¹⁴ In addition, more and more documents from the late 13th century contain their author’s signature. The fact remains that a chancery, as an institution housed in specific premises with its own staff that monopolized the writing of official acts, hardly existed in 13th-century Norway. Based on this definition, we cannot speak of a royal chancery proper before the early 14th century. However, loose, decentralized and embryonic as it was, a structure existed in the 13th century that was able to meet the kings’ administrative needs.

⁷¹² Clanchy 1993; Strayer 1998.

⁷¹³ Thomas Riis. 1977. *Les institutions politiques centrales du Danemark 1100–1332*. Odense: Odense University Press: 66–86; Damsholt 1977, 66–85; Fichteneau 1956–57, 299–318; Olivier Guyotjeannin. 1998. “Le roi de France en ses préambules.” *Annuaire-bulletin de la Société de l’histoire de France*. Paris: Librairie Renouard: 21–44.

⁷¹⁴ Bagge 2010a, 243 ff.

From the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson onwards however, we perceive tendencies towards a growing specialization of the chancellor's function and an increasing sophistication of the office of chancery. Sverre Bagge believes that, although much of the functioning of the "chancery" relied on a staff external to the royal milieu, there increasingly developed a core group of scribes more permanently bound to the kings.⁷¹⁵ For instance, under the reign of King Magnus the Lawmender the title of chancellor appears in the documentation. The *Hirðskrá* (1274–77) mentions the *Kansler* as one of the king's most prominent advisors, in charge of taking "care assiduously for the king's seal and to write those documents which the king dictates to him."⁷¹⁶ Indeed the Law bears witness of King Magnus' project to generalize the use of the written word in the very functioning of the government. Chapter 35 indicates how royal stewards shall confirm their office with a letter to the chancellor. The Law furnishes a model with précised formulas and "holes" which the steward will have to fill with his specific information.⁷¹⁷ In view of the charter production (see above), the need for administrative writing increased in the 1280s, so that permanent or semi-permanent structure became increasingly necessary. In particular, Håkon Håkonsson had several Royal Chapels built adjacent to the royal residences, whose clerics served the administrative needs of the Norwegian kings. The Church of the Apostles in Bergen, close to the main 13th-century residence of the kings, probably housed the most important royal proto-chancery as well as the royal archives.⁷¹⁸

A decisive step in the development of the royal chancery was taken in the early 14th century under the aegis of King Håkon v Magnusson (1299–1319). In the first years of his reign, the king granted 14 of these churches important donations as well as major economic privileges.⁷¹⁹ In February 1308, he obtained a series of privileges exempting these churches from episcopal jurisdiction from Pope Clement v.⁷²⁰ While the Church of St Mary's in Oslo was the particular beneficiary of these grants, on the whole, the economic and jurisdictional privileges contributed to definitively emancipate these 14 churches from the bishop's influence and to consolidate the king's control over a competent body of clerics. In the summer of 1314, King Håkon v promoted the clerics of

715 Sverre Bagge. 1976. *Den Kongelige Kapellgeistlighet 1150–1319*. Universitetsforlaget: 81.

716 *Gæyma sem rækaelegast konongs jnsiglis oc gera þau bref sem konongr segir honom fyrir*. (*Hsk*, Ch. 21).

717 *Hsk*, Ch. 36.

718 Einar Blix. 1964. "Hadde Norge et Riksarkiv i Middelalderen." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol 43: 165–167; Bagge 1977, 53 ff.

719 Bagge 1977, 89 ff.

720 *DN* I, nr. 113; *DN* I, nr. 114; *DN* I, nr. 115 and *DN* VI, nr. 70.

the St Mary's to high positions and the office of royal chancellor was combined with the provostship.⁷²¹

The organization of the royal chancery – specialization, settling – thus was not achieved before the end of the High Middle Ages. Yet the use of writing in the royal administration on a significant level is attested throughout the 13th century. In this respect the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson (1217–1263) marked a decisive turn. The amount of letters extant may not be very impressive (9), but evidence from the *Håkonar saga Hákonarsonar*, which refers to ninety-nine letters from the chancery, suggests a more advanced level of written administration.⁷²² As shown in figure 3 and table 2, diplomatic production really took off in the 1270s, with yearly production increasing fourfold between 1217 and 1299.

Of course the production of the 13th- and early 14th-century Norwegian “chanceries” did not match that of their English and French counterparts.⁷²⁴

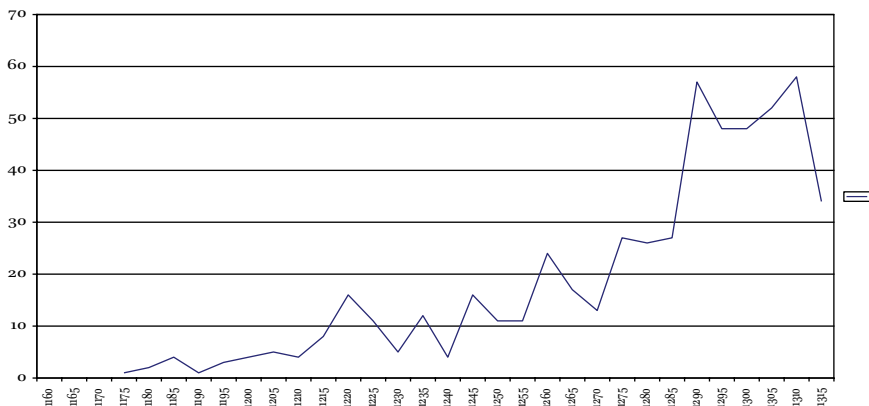


FIGURE 3 Output of royal chancery (1160–1319)⁷²³

721 DN I, nr. 143.

722 J.R. Hagland. 1986. *Riksstyring og Språknorm. Spørsmålet om kongskanselliets rolle i norsk språkhistorie på 1200- og første halvdel av 1300-tallet*. Novus Forlag. Oslo: 21 ff.

723 This graphic is based on *Regesta Norvegica*, vol. I, II, and III. Oslo 1989. The numbers take into account the royal chancery total output, i.e. domestic documents and letters meant to foreign recipients. It is only registered original or copies extant as well as documents which have been mentioned in sources. Furthermore, a significant number of diplomas of imprecise dating do not figure on the graphic: 11 (for the period 1163–1202), 8 (1202–1217), 12 (1217–1263), 15 (1299–1319), and 5 (1261–1299).

724 For 13th century England see, Clanchy 1993, 57 ff; For the Capetian chancery, see Guyotjeannin 2006, 240 ff; See also Elizabeth Danbury. 1989. “The Chanceries of England and France.” In Michael Jones and Malcom Vale (ed.) *England and Her Neighbors, 1066–1453: Essays in Honour of Pierre Chaplais*. London: Hambledon.

TABLE 2 *Yearly production of letters from the royal chanceries according to Regesta Norvegica*

	1130–1202	1202–1217	1217–1263	1263–1280	1280–1299	1299–1319
Nbr. reg.	27	23	122	76	159	216
% yearly	0,37	1,5	2,65	4,47	8,36	10,8

Nevertheless, they provided the Norwegian kings with a new means of communication and a new medium through which to exalt the monarchy.

Administrative writing became an important means of communication, as it enabled kings to reach every part of the Norwegian society as well as foreign dignitaries. To a large extent, royal letters addressed the elite of the Norwegian kingdom and abroad, but not all letters were written for this audience. From 1217 to 1319, between a quarter and a third of the letters extant address the Church in Norway or the papacy. Addressees could be ecclesiastic institutions that received gifts and privileges, or the bishops or popes. The great majority of letters were written in Latin. Roughly the same share of letters was intended for foreign rulers and was also written in Latin. This could be simple correspondence or more official treaties. About half of the corpus of letters extant was addressed to lay domestic addressees and was written in the vernacular. Although formulaic conventions present these letters as *litterae apertae* (open letters), that is letters meant for a large audience, in practice however many were closed letters intended for private persons, the king's officers, members of the *hirð* and barons.⁷²⁵ Nonetheless, many letters were really open letters for the people. As the recurrence of the formula, *sem þetta bref sja eða hæyra*, "to those who see or hear this letter," in the *inscriptio* of most domestic letters suggests, these letters were meant to be proclaimed at public assemblies. These letters could address a quite specific population, like the townsmen of Bergen in 1304,⁷²⁶ the population of regions (Oppdal 1304,⁷²⁷ the Faroese 1298⁷²⁸), or the entire realm (edict of May 1290).⁷²⁹

It is not the aim here to provide a thorough examination of the formulas and terminology used in the corpus of charters and letters from the 13th century.

⁷²⁵ Blom 1967, 127 ff; Hødnebo 1969, 12; Agerholt 1932, 660 ff.

⁷²⁶ *NgL* III, nr. 20.

⁷²⁷ *DN* IV, nr. 58.

⁷²⁸ *NgL* III, 33–34.

⁷²⁹ *NgL* III, 17.

Such a task would require great meticulousness to grasp this difficult and scarce material. Unfortunately, the following analysis is unable to draw upon Norwegian scholarship, which has absorbed almost nothing from nearly four decades of research in the general field of medieval European diplomatics and charter studies. *Gamal Brevskipnad, etterrøkjingar og utgreidingar i norsk Diplomattikk* (1929–1932), Agerholt's extensive and erudite study, remains the largely unmatched standard in modern Norwegian scholarship. Only Lars Hamre's short *Innføring i Diplomattikk* from 1972 has "updated" the study of diplomatic formulas in the Norwegian corpus. I will here simply explore the "communicative" and "propagandistic" value of royal letters around few central themes that illustrate how the royal chancery spread an ideology of kingship.

The abandoning of Latin for the vernacular made royal letters a powerful instrument of communication that was able to more easily reach both an audience of illiterates through being read aloud and of literates who had not mastered Latin. Bagge argues that the use of ON in letters probably stems from the years of the civil war, which developed an important propaganda in the vernacular.⁷³⁰ It is true that the saga tradition and in particular a pamphlet like *The speech against the bishops* indicates a clear rejection of Latin in the written propaganda to win over popular adhesion. However, although Danish and Swedish practices long continued to use Latin, the use of the vernacular in the 13th century is by no means particular to Norway. Indeed, in France, England, Germany, and Italy, vernacular languages were widely used in royal charters from the beginning of the 13th century onwards.⁷³¹

The formulas of royal letters followed a more or less fixed composition of different parts that aimed at introducing, legitimizing and concluding the letter.⁷³² An examination of the terminology used in royal letters and its developments show that over the course of the 13th century, the royal chancery developed routines and new standards of diplomatic practice that incorporated ideological references into the formulas exalting the Norwegian monarchy.

In 13th-century Norway, some elements of terminology were introduced in the diplomatic practices that emphasized the power and the authority of the Norwegian monarchs. An important innovation in diplomatics was the adoption of the *pluralis majestatis* in Norwegian letters. The *pluralis majestatis* referred to the king in the first person plural, "We." The significance of the majestic plural is subject to different interpretations. In some instances it is

730 Bagge 2010a, 263.

731 Guyotjeannin 2006, 92–95.

732 Hamre 1972, 27 ff; Guyotjeannin 2006, 72 ff.

believed to assimilate royal authority to that of all the subjects of the realm.⁷³³ It could also designate the monarch and God, expressing that the king acted conjointly with the deity. In any case, in substituting for the first person singular, the use of the *pluralis majestatis* meant that the king did not act in a personal capacity but as holder of an office, a notion that promoted the concept of state and of royal office as timeless and detached from the person of the king. We register the first occurrence of *pluralis majestatis* in a Norwegian royal letter in a letter from King Philip Simonsson (1207–1217) to the Abbey of Hovedøya. The corpus of letters extant shows that after this introduction, the majestic plural was used systematically in every royal letter from that date on.⁷³⁴

We have already mentioned the changes made to the royal title, which laid emphasis on dynastic continuity. In the 13th century, the royal title of Norwegian kings also incorporated the devotional formula *Dei gratia*, by the grace of God, in the *intitulatio* of royal letters. The devotional formula expresses the idea that the king “owes his earthly mission to the grace of God” and enhanced his divine legitimacy.⁷³⁵ Its use is first witnessed in the 13th century in Latin letters addressed to foreign rulers. Thus in the letters from King Håkon Håkonsson to the English king Henry III in 1224, or to the town of Lübeck in 1250, the *intitulatio* designated the king as

*H[enrico], Dei gratia illustrissimo Anglorum regi, H[aco] eadem gratia rex Norwegie*⁷³⁶

[To H[enry], glorious King of England by the grace of God, from H[aco] by the same grace King of Norway]

*H[aco] dei gracia rex Norwagie*⁷³⁷

[From H[aco] by the grace of God King of Norway]

This formula remained a permanent element in every Latin letter throughout the 13th century; its ON version, *með Guðs miskunn*, appeared sporadically in domestic letters written during the reigns of King Håkon Håkonsson and King Magnus the Lawmender. However, the devotional formula was to become a

733 Fagnen 1984, 90.

734 DN I, nr. 3. Agerholt 1932, 764. The sole exception is the letter of privileges to the church of Stavanger (1226–1245) (DN I, nr. 51). See the discussion in Odd Sandaaker. 1970. «Håkon Håkonsson of Stavanger-privilegiet.» *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 49: 286–309.

735 Harry Bresslau. 1912. *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre für Deutschland und Italien*. Vol. 1 Leipzig: 47.

736 DN XIX, nr. 153.

737 DN V, nr. 4.

permanent part of the royal title under the reign of King Eirik Magnusson (1280–1299).⁷³⁸ This occurrence must be seen in connection with the royal coronations, which from the mid-13th century had systematically sacralized the rule of the Sverrir dynasty. Indeed, under the reign of King Eirik, the importance of coronation was augmented with the introduction and standardization of two elements in the *intitulatio* of royal letters: references to royal filiation and to the crown.

As we have seen previously (III, 7), King Håkon Håkonsson and King Magnus the Lawmender added their filiation to their titles.

Hakon konongr sonær hakonar konongs (Bergen 1219–1263)⁷³⁹

[King Hakon son of King Hakon]

M[agnus] konongr sunr H[akonar] konongs (1265)⁷⁴⁰

[King Magnus son of King Hakon]

Sometimes the filiation could jump generations and go back to the founder of the dynasty, King Sverre.

Hákon konungr son Hákonar konungs sonarson Sverris Konungs (1260)⁷⁴¹

[King Hakon son of King Hakon grandson of King Sverre]

Magnus með guðs miskunn Noregs konongr son hakonar konungs sunarsunar Sverris konungs (1274)⁷⁴²

[Magnus by the grace of God King of Norway son of King Hakon grandson of King Sverre]

These additions were sporadic under King Håkon Håkonsson and became more frequent under his successor. With King Eirik Magnusson however, filiation to the predecessor was used systematically in charter practices.

Finally, the reign of King Eirik added another innovation in introducing a new term into the royal title in addition to the filiation, *hins koronada*, “the crowned.” The introduction came relatively late in Eirik’s reign, as its first occurrence was in 1289 in a letter from Duke Håkon Magnusson.

⁷³⁸ Hamre 1972, 34.

⁷³⁹ *NgL* I, 462.

⁷⁴⁰ DN II, nr. 12.

⁷⁴¹ *NgL* II, 308.

⁷⁴² *NgL* II, 7.

*Hakon meðr guðs miskunn Noregs hertoge son Magnus konongs hins koronada*⁷⁴³

[Hakon by the grace of God Duke of Norway son of King Magnus the Crowned]

The reference to the crowning of King Magnus may have been the result of foreign influence.⁷⁴⁴ In any case, it contributed to emphasize the sacred legitimacy of the two heirs. The extension of the title was widely used in royal and ducal letters, albeit not systematic. A few original letters, although referring to the filiation with King Magnus, do not allude to his crowning. Indeed, once Håkon Magnusson became king in 1299, this usage dropped slightly.

Arengas

In the text of letters, a second formula, the arenga, has been associated with diplomatic propaganda. The arenga is a formula stating in general terms the reasons and the legitimacy for issuing the letter.⁷⁴⁵ It was usually placed at the beginning of the text. Arengas can have different objectives: to spark the interest of the reader (*captatio benevolentiae*) or to preserve the memory of things. They can also refer to the rights and duties of the kings, and thereby potentially convey ideological references. The value of arengas for historians has been the subject of debate in the scholarship of diplomatics and medieval history.⁷⁴⁶ Increasingly, scholars have argued that arengas may conceal a political program and may have been used as propaganda.⁷⁴⁷ However, arengas were generally and largely optional in medieval diplomas.⁷⁴⁸ They were also scarce in the medieval Norwegian corpus. In addition, most of the time they were replaced by a motivation formula placed indiscriminately in the text.⁷⁴⁹ However, some examples witness that the arenga or motivation clause in Norwegian letters played a role in the crown's legitimizing strategies.

A central theme of motivation clauses stressed the duty of kings to support and help the Church. The kings' duties towards the Church largely dominated

743 DN II, nr. 25.

744 Agerholt 1924, 440–443.

745 Guyotjeannin 2006, 76.

746 Brégaint 2009, 56–58.

747 See Damsholt 1970, 66–108; Riis 1977, 66–85; Brégaint 2009, 55–86; Maria José Azevedo santos. 2001. “O ‘ornamento literário’ em documentos medievais: O preâmbulo ou arenga (773?–1123).” In *Estudos de Diplomática Portuguesa*. Coimbra: Edicoes Colibri: 167–190; Fichtenau 1956–57, 299–318.

748 For France, see Guyotjeannin 1999, 24–27.

749 Hamre 1972, 45.

the themes of arengas in European and Scandinavian practice.⁷⁵⁰ In the donation letter to the Archbishop of Nidaros of 1222, at the end of the donation of coinage rights, a formula very nearly fulfils the function of an arenga:

We have agreed to this because we believe that it will bring us the gratitude of God, and be of benefit to the place of the Holy King Olav, and that it will harm no good men.⁷⁵¹

There, the king justified the concession to the archbishop: to please God and to help the bishopric. Shortly later, in the 1224 letter from King Håkon Håkonsson to the people of Eiker, in a combined *prohibitio-arenga* passage, the author emphasized the duty of the king to honor and promote both God and the Church:

...because we will not suffer it from anyone, neither rich nor poor, to rob God and the Holy Church, from which we are all to receive honor and satisfaction both in this world and in the next.⁷⁵²

In these two arengas, the king is presented as the protector and the benefactor of the church, assuring its protection and supporting its prosperity with various donations. Finally, the second paragraph of the donation letter to the bishopric of Stavanger (1226–1245) underscored the duty of all Christians to support the church, and thereafter emphasized that this duty was greater for those who had been elevated by God with authority and princely names:

A great debt is owed by both rich and poor who have touched Christianity [...] all those who God has honored with lands and the names of chiefs, to support her [the Church] and strengthen her in all good things.⁷⁵³

Lastly, in the protocol of an amendment of 1263 which compelled the inhabitants of the bishopric of Hamar to pay the tithe, the arenga stresses the duty of

750 See in Damsholt 1970, 89 ff; Riis 1977, 73 ff.

751 *haffum ver iattat þetta firer þui at ver ætлом at her man gudi afuusa a uera oc gagn megi af standa stad hins helga Olafs konongs. oc enghum godom manne till vanhags.* (DN III, nr. 1: 14–17, p. 1).

752 *firir þvi at ver vilium eingum þat þola hvaðke rikum ne orikum. at ræne guð oc heilagha kirkui. er ver skulum alla fræmd oc upreist af tacka bæðe þessa heims oc annars.* (DN II, nr. 5: 2–4, p. 7).

753 *Margfalleget scylda. kræfr bæðe rika oc orika þa sem við cristni hava tekit [...] allum er guð hevir með riki oc með höfðingia namne gofgat. at styðia hana oc styrkia til allra rettra luta.* (DN I, nr. 51: 5–6, p. 7–9).

kings to support and promote God's will on earth in keeping with the pattern of the world order created by God:

All Christian kings from the beginning of time shall own the honor of kings from carrying forth and advancing the commands of God with the strength and the power vested in them by God.⁷⁵⁴

Several motivation clauses deal with the king's fundamental duty to protect his subjects. In an edict issued by King Eirik Magnusson and Duke Håkon Magnusson about the tithe in May 1290, the *publicatio* is introduced by a formula stressing both this duty and the subordination of the royal subjects.

And because we concede our duty to take care of the interest of every man, those who are subject to our command and protection⁷⁵⁵

Finally, arengas in royal letters are also dominated by statements about the function of kings as keepers of laws and justice. The edict from King Håkon Magnusson about the Law of Succession and Regency in 1302 justifies the revision of the Law of Succession of King Magnus the Lawmender (1273) in stressing the king's general duty to enforce the laws.

Now because we promised God in our consecration that we would keep and let keep the laws that the holy King Olaf introduced⁷⁵⁶

Formulas of Date

Finally, our last examination of formulaic practices concerns the dating clause. The eschatocol, that is, the concluding part of charters and letters, used to contain indications about the date of emission of the document. In the Middle Ages, two systems competed. One, the clerical system, dated letters in years after the birth of Jesus Christ (*anno domini*), while another system counted in years from the beginning of the reign of the king. Several studies have shown that dating practices had a political dimension. Dating letters from the reign of the king was a means for noblemen to recognize

754 *Aller krisnir konnongaer fra uphafue hæimsæns af skyldu kononglægrar tignær eygu at flitiae ok fræmiaæ guds bodord med styrk ok valde þui sem gud hefuer þeim gefuett. (NgL I, nr. 13).*

755 *Oc af þui at uer kennum oss skylduga at hugsa vm alra manna naudsyniar. þera sem vndir uart uald oc vernd ero skipader (NgL III, 17).*

756 *Nu saker þess at uer iattadom gudi I vigslu uare. at uer skuldum þau logh halda oc haldazst leta sem hin helgi Olafir konongr hof (NgL III, 45).*

royal authority and in certain circumstances could be used to display loyalty to their lord.⁷⁵⁷ By contrast, keeping a religious dating system could mean an act of defiance.⁷⁵⁸ By using the regnal system, kings aimed at “standing out from the purely ecclesiastical calendar to refer to the elements that mattered in the life of subjects and of the royal crown, i.e. the major events of the life of the sovereign, essentially his coronation.”⁷⁵⁹ Through this practice, royal documents centered time’s conception on the crown, thereby enhancing royal authority over society.

In the early 13th century, most Norwegian royal letters lacked dates. Even when the documents effectively are dated, we cannot really find a definite and permanent practice. Under Magnus Håkonsson, royal letters and edicts in Latin and ON often combined a dating after Christ and after the years of reign, counting from the year of the acclamation at the *konungstekja*.⁷⁶⁰ For instance, King Magnus’s Land Law of June 1274 was dated

1274 winters from the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the 11th year of the reign of King Magnus.⁷⁶¹

The reign of Eirik Magnusson seems to mark a new epoch in the standardization of dating practices, as all royal letters in ON issued after 1292 abandoned the double date system for the benefits of the regnal system.⁷⁶² For instance, the letter from King Eirik and Duke Håkon from March 1293 bears the formula

This letter was made in Bergen on Tuesday of the third week of Easter, in the 13th year of our reign.⁷⁶³

When Håkon Magnusson succeeded his brother in July 1299, his ON letters were dated from his reign. Thus the first extant letter from his rule as king, 28 August 1299, carries the date clause

757 Georg Scheibelreiter. 1976. “Die deutsche Thronstreit 1198–1208 im Spiegel der Datierungen von Privaturkunden.” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* Vol. 84: 337–377.

758 Guyotjeannin 2006, 85.

759 «...à se démarquer du calendrier purement ecclésiastique pour faire référence aux seuls éléments qui comptent dans la vie des sujets et de la couronne royale, c’est à dire les grands événements de la vie du souverain, essentiellement son couronnement. » (Author’s translation) (Fagnen 1984, 93).

760 Hamre 1972, 58–59.

761 *fra burð uars Ihesu Christi. m.cc.lxx. oc. liij. uetr. a .xi. are rikis Magnus konungs* (NgL III, 5).

762 Agerholt 1929, 463–470.

763 *Petta bref var gert i Bergwin tysdagin i þriðiu viku langa föstu a xiii are rikis vars.* (DN II, nr. 33).

This letter has been made in Bergen the Friday after the mass of Bartholomew, the first year of our reign.⁷⁶⁴

Royal Seals

The content of letters constituted an important means for kings to spread ideas and concepts legitimizing royal power and authority. The physical dimension of royal charters and letters was also decisive. The saga material testifies to the practice of exhibiting letters in public as political instruments. Thus King Sverre staged the arrival of a forged papal bull disavowing the Archbishop of Nidaros, showing the letter to his audience to display the papal seal.⁷⁶⁵ Charters and letters bore seals that served to authenticate the document's origin. But their iconographic symbolism also made them decisive means of power display. In 13th-century Norway, the surviving seals show that they constituted media imparting important political messages. The examination of the iconography and symbolism of seals would take up more space than available here. The following discussion aims only at highlighting a few general elements in the iconography and terminology of royal seals in the 13th century.

The first extant royal seal stems from King Inge Bårdsson (1204–1217). It represents the king in majesty, seating on a throne, crowned, and bearing a scepter. The legend around the outer circle of the seal bears the title SIGILLUM: DEI: GRATIA: INGONIS: REGIS (Seal of Inge king by the grace of God), attesting of the earliest use of the devotional formula in 13th-century Norway.⁷⁶⁶ From the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson an incomplete double-sided seal survives, which on the obverse displays the king in majesty, enthroned, and bearing a crown and a sword. The legend also mentions the devotional formula: SIGI[llvm Haconis magni dei grac]IA: REGIS: NORWEG[ie] (Seal of Håkon the Great, by the grace of God King of Norway). The reverse shows a representation of the king as a knight, riding a horse and wearing armor, a helmet, sword and a shield bearing the arms of the king. The legend lays emphasis on the king's functions as keeper of justice: REX HACO MAGNUS SUBIECTIS: MITIS VT[agnus:ivstis letatur:iniustis ense mi]NATUR (King Håkon the Great, mild as a lamb with the vanquished, rejoicing over the just, threatening the unjust by the sword).⁷⁶⁷ The image of the lamb is probably a

764 *þetta vart bref ær gort var j Biorgwin friadagen nesta eftir Bartholomeus mæsso a fyrsta are rikis vars* (DN II, nr. 52).

765 See for instance, II, 4.

766 Chr. Brinchmann. 1924. *Norske konge-sigiller og andre fyrste-sigiller fra middelalderen*. Kristiania: Det Mallingske Bogtrykkeri: 1 and Plate 1. 3.

767 Brinchmann 1924, 3 and Plate III.

reference to King Sverre's now lost seal, which according to an English chronicle read "wild as a lion, mild as a lamb." The seal of his son, King Håkon the Young, bore a legend on the equestrian side referring to knightly values: REX: HACO: PRECLARUS: PROBUS: AR/M/IS: PEC[tore: gnar/vs], (King Håkon the Fair, brave in arms).⁷⁶⁸ The emphasis on the royal function as upholder of justice and the obvious references to courtly culture reflect the ideology developed under the kings and which is expounded in the *Konungs Skuggsía* and the translated knightly romances.⁷⁶⁹

The seals of King Magnus the Lawmender and King Eirik Magnusson show great similarities. An extant round and damaged seal of King Magnus the Lawmender illustrates that its chancery retained the established iconography of the king in majesty and riding a horse. The legend on the obverse seems to have kept the devotional formula: [Sigillum Magni Haconis (?) filii (?) dei gracia] REGIS [Nor]WAGIE.⁷⁷⁰ Similarly, the three extant seals of King Eirik carry on side depicting the king in majesty the title SIGILLUM ERICI: DEI: GR[acia]: R[e]GIS: NORWAGIE (Seal of Eirik by the grace of God King of Norway) and SIGILLUM ERICI: MAGNI DEI GRACIA REGIS NORWEGIE (Seal of Eirik the Great by the grace of God King of Norway).⁷⁷¹ The reverse of Magnus's and Eirik's seals witnesses of great innovations. First, both seals bear a royal title that underscores royal authority not only over Norway, but over the whole Norwegian realm with its dominions:

NORI[ca regna rego nomine Magnus] ego⁷⁷²

[In the Name of Magnus I rule over the Northern Kingdoms]

REX ERICUS [eg]O: NORICA REGNE:REGO⁷⁷³

[King Eirik I rule over the Northern Kingdoms]

ERI[cus m]AGNvs EGO NORICA REGN[a reg]:FILII REGIS MAGNI QWARTI⁷⁷⁴

[Eirik the Great I rule over the Northern Kingdoms, Son of King Magnus the Fourth]

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 and Plate IV. The proposition by Brinchmann (p. 3) concerning the missing part of the seal [ectore gnarus] is rather doubtful and does not make any sense.

⁷⁶⁹ See III, 6.

⁷⁷⁰ Brinchmann 1924, 4 and Plate V–VI.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5–9 and Plate VII–XIV.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, 4 and Plate VI.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5 and Plate VII and VIII.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 and Plate IX.

The reference to the realm and its dependencies here reflected the new dimension of royal authority, which since 1264–67 and the annexation of Iceland and Greenland covered the Faroe Islands, the Shetland Islands, the Isle of Man, and the Hebrides.

It is no wonder that the pioneer of Norwegian diplomatics, Johan Agerholt, started his study in 1280, as the reign of King Eirik was pivotal in the development and use of charters and letters. Royal seals plainly confirm this impression. First we should mention the multiplication of seals. In contrast to Kings Håkon Håkonsson and Magnus the Lawmender, of whom we have two extant seals each, we have four seals extant from King Eirik and three from Håkon Magnusson (two ducal and one royal). This relative abundance of seals bears witness to the dynamism of the royal chancery and also maybe to its receptivity to foreign impulses. While the seals of King Eirik Magnusson and King Håkon v Magnusson kept much of the preceding iconographic and formulaic features – the king in majesty and the equestrian image, and the devotional formula *Dei gracia* – they also attest some innovations. Eirik's third seal and Håkon's royal seal display a very refined equestrian picture, which probably followed a French original model.⁷⁷⁵ However, two of Eirik's seals and the ducal seals of Håkon v have replaced the equestrian side with a shield with the dynasty's coat of arms, representing a crowned lion bearing an axe. The axe was the symbol of the saint-king Olaf, and its insertion in the coat of arms symbolized that the king was the rightful heir and descendant of the *rex perpetuus Norvegiae*, "Eternal King of Norway."⁷⁷⁶

Another remarkable trait of the seals of King Magnus's sons is the addition in the royal title of their filiation with King Magnus the Lawmender. As shown below, the third seal of King Eirik adds *FILII REGIS MAGNI QWARTI* (son of King Magnus the Fourth) to the royal title. A royal seal of King Håkon v includes the same terminology:

*HAQvINI: QviNTY: DEI: GRaciA: REGIS: NORWEGIE: FILII: REGIS: MAGNI: QWARTI*⁷⁷⁷

[Håkon the Fifth by the Grace the God King of Norway Son of Magnus the Fourth]

⁷⁷⁵ "Kongesegl," by Hallvard Trætteberg, *KLNM* Vol. IX: 52.

⁷⁷⁶ Hallvard Trætteberg. 1933. "Norges statssymboler inntil 1814." *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norw.) Vol. 29, no. 8 and 9.

⁷⁷⁷ Brinchmann 1924, 13 and Plate XIII.

The emphasis on royal filiation clearly stressed dynastic continuity and echoes contemporary *intitulaciones* in royal charters, which, as we have seen, more systematically referred to the filiation of the two heirs with their father, King Magnus. The practice was still used when Håkon became king, whereas the reference to royal authority over the tributary lands *NORICA REGNA REGO* was abandoned.

We see that over the course of the 13th century, royal diplomatic practices became richer and more sophisticated. The examination of royal ideology and symbolism in royal letters through the terminology used in the text or in the iconography of royal seals underscores the value of royal letters as instruments of political communication. Formulaic elements were introduced, standardized or simply disappeared in close interaction with the political situation of the kingdom or the kings' political programs.

In many respects, the reign of King Eirik Magnusson (1280–1299) marked a turning point in the development of diplomatic practices. The growing standardization of formulaic practices through the systematic use of the devotional formula *Dei gratia*, dynastic filiation, the *pluralis majestatis*, a more rigorous system of dating and the presence of ideological concepts in arengas emphasizing the kings' rights and duties coincided with a significant growth in the production of letters and shows that royal power increasingly asserted itself through its official acts. In addition, the standardization of formulas conferred a uniformity and repetitiveness that emphasized continuity and the legitimacy of royal dynastic power.⁷⁷⁸ Royal seals confirm the key position of Eirik's reign, during which they gained in refinement and, despite discrepancies, became more closely aligned with the formulaic standards of the letters. The pivotal character of Eirik's reign in diplomatic practices is puzzling. Indeed, the minority of King Eirik Magnusson does not suggest strong royal involvement. However, the king did not rule alone and his barons were loyal supporters of his rule and of the dynasty. Some of them may have been responsible for the implementation of new routines. The changes can also be seen as the result of the continuous progress of the royal administration, which at some points was able to improve its practices. Foreign influence is also to be considered. The "taking off" of the Norwegian production of royal letters in the last decades of the 13th century was not a local phenomenon, but part of a general growth in every major monarchy of Europe.⁷⁷⁹ The proliferation of letters

⁷⁷⁸ Damsholt 1970, 70–71.

⁷⁷⁹ For England see, Clanchy 1993, 57 ff; For France see, Robert Fawtier. 1953. *Comptes Royaux* (1285–1314). Paris: Librairie Klincksieck.

and charters disseminated new modes and practices and was self-reinforcing. It stimulated international contact, local production and the adoption of common practices. The Norwegian royal chancery of the late 13th century had thus become a central element in the processes of adopting administrative culture from Western Europe.

Lastly we have to consider the impact of letters and charters in the spread of political messages. The scholarship of charter studies only addresses the issue of reception to a limited extent. As mentioned above, the saga material does not provide much information about how royal letters were received in the population. In addition, the saga material disappeared precisely when charter and letter production rose in the 1280s. We can assume however that the use of the vernacular was certainly an important tool for reaching a broader audience. More importantly, the standardization and stereotyping of diplomatic formulations contributed to the conditioning of minds. The concept of *doxa* can be associated with the ideological and propagandist value of diplomas. The term of *doxa* refers to a set of prejudices and values taken for granted, the function of which is to propagate an ideology while masking it. This concept has been used by P. Bourdieu to insist on the conditioning processes that transformed a vision of a social order into a self-evident truth. Bourdieu argues that the embodiment of social structures results from mental forging that makes "the social order progressively inscribed into people's minds."⁷⁸⁰ In a similar way, the repetitiveness of formulas in royal charters and letters was a way of embodying notions and concepts that consolidated and legitimized royal authority so as to make them obvious and permanent in people's minds.

9 Conclusion

The period examined in this final part was decisive in the making of royal communication. It was characterized by a greater involvement of the Norwegian kings at every level of the production of communication, creating a system of communication able to satisfy the Norwegian monarchy's need for control of the aristocracy and emancipation from the Church.

The end of the civil war and the advent of a period of political stability allowed the crown to strengthen its hold over communication through multiple appropriation processes in the means and *loci* of communication.

⁷⁸⁰ Bourdieu 1984, 470–471.

The extensive involvement of the Norwegian kings in the written word remains most remarkable aspect in the development of royal communication. In a context of increased literacy, the Norwegian kings quickly became major actors in the Norwegian literary landscape, demonstrating their leadership through patronage over courtly literature. Their involvement in the making of histories and the translation of chivalric literature provided Norwegian kings with effective channels for consolidating their control over the lay elite, implementing values and norms of submission to royal authority and defending the court system. Finally, the Norwegian kingship will build up a royal chancery, providing kings with an administration and mediums dedicated to the exaltation of the kingship.

Norwegian kings also achieved greater control over the means of ritual communication. First, through their own performance and that of their *hirð*, kings were more closely involved in the staging of rituals of succession and of domination, exalting monarchic power and dynastic legitimacy. Second, Norwegian kings developed the various phases (banquets and celebrations, pre-meetings before *konungstekja*) surrounding religious ceremonies to capitalize upon the prestige and authority which they conferred upon the kings to further their political ambitions. Royal control was also realized in the appropriation of the *loci* of communication production, first and foremost the development of the royal court, which provided Norwegian kings with a locus for dialogue as well as an instrument of control over the elite of the realm.

These appropriation processes developed in close relationship with the Church. Due to limited literacy, the clergy still more or less monopolized basic technical competencies in writing, which was a persistent motive of dependency for the kingship. The domestic networks of ecclesiastic institutions still constituted major centers of literary production, which kings relied on. Similarly, royal commitment to the staging and exploitation of the rituals and ceremonies of kingship were still greatly dependent of the intercession of the clergy and their symbolic authority and prestige. However, the processes at play in the field of written and ritualistic communication in 13th-century Norway marked a decisive emancipation of the kingship from ecclesiastic interference. With the growth of court connections and the involvement of the aristocracy, the crown partly overrode ecclesiastic mediation and gained direct access to foreign connections and culture. Finally, in establishing Bergen as the center for royal ceremonies (necropolis, crowning) and in contesting the pre-eminence of Nidaros in the ritual of the *konungstekja*, the Norwegian kingship challenged the political and symbolic authority of the Norwegian archbishops and brought the rituals that made kings under the control of the monarchy.

Finally, the previous analysis has magnified the pivotal role of the *hirð* in the communication initiated by the 13th-century kings. If the civil war had gathered the lay aristocracy under the authority of a single king, the peace that followed was used to consolidate this royal hold. The *hirð* was thus the object of an intense enterprise of control and discipline at the royal court. Through the instruction of courtly behavior and the ritualization of daily life at court, the king's courtiers learned and practiced not only body techniques and manners, but also hierarchical values and subordination to royal authority. This apprenticeship was conducted via the written word: books of conduct (*Konungs Skuggsía*) and court codes (*Hirðskrá*), but also a courtly literature largely sponsored through royal patronage. The introduction of the Matters at the royal court not only provided the lay aristocracy with illustrations of correct conduct, but also satisfied their taste for and interest in contemporary European culture. The crown's efforts were not limited to neutralizing the lay elite, but also aimed to transform it into a useful instrument for its political ambitions. Thus the *hirð* was not only the target for royal communication. The disciplining of the *hirð* and its aesthetical performance were fully exploited by kings in their ritualistic communication. Through participation in the staging of rituals, the *hirð* directly increased not only the splendor and solemnity of royal rituals, but also the authority of the kings in the processes of royal succession.

Conclusions

We began this study with a commonplace: The Norwegian state took shape in the 12th and 13th centuries. There is nothing new to this statement, although some may be skeptical whether a state existed at all. To claim that the Norwegian state came into being in the High Middle Ages does not mean that the state existed at a particular given moment. By the end of the 13th century however, some fundamental state structures were clearly established. Before that date, some processes were underway. This study has taken up one of them, and not the least important: the legitimization of state-making. In the previous pages we have examined how, from the mid-twelfth century, the Norwegian royals formed their communication system through the progressive appropriation and control of the means and forms of communication. At the end of our period, the Norwegian kings had a coherent and autonomous communication system at their disposal, suited to the affirmation of royal authority over society.

This system was coherent because it encompassed every major form of written and ritualistic communication available. It was composed of a set of rituals accompanying every decisive moment of the reign of Norwegian kings, their “election” to the throne, their consecration and their funeral. All these elements provided the Norwegian kingship with opportunities to exalt their power and consolidate their authority over society. In addition, some rituals like Solemn Entries were there to regularly “re-heat” monarchic sentiment among urban audiences. They also had at their command literature, laws and charters which they produced, and which also were used to convey royal ideology to society. The kings’ communication system also included a diversified landscape of *loci* of communication where the media and the ideology of kingship was both produced and received. At home, Norwegian kings relied on a network of monastic and ecclesiastic centers spread throughout the Norwegian monarchy’s sphere of political influence and increasingly centered on the royal court. The peripatetic nature of the royal court and the fact that it gathered the aristocracy from the whole kingdom provided an efficient means for royal propaganda to reach every corner of the realm.

Finally, the system was autonomous because over the course of the period, the Norwegian kings succeeded in evading the political and partly the cultural control of the Church. The Norwegian kingship established itself as a key player in every field of communication. Going from outsiders in the field of written communication in the 12th century, Norwegian kings and their courts affirmed themselves as key players in vernacular literary activity in general and in literature exalting the kingship in particular. Royal involvement also

expressed itself in the growth of the institution of the royal chancery in the last quarter of the 13th century, which institutionalized the use of the written word for the exercise of government. While the role of clerics remained decisive in religious rituals and ceremonies, Norwegian kings and their agents increased their participation to gain the maximum symbolic power from ceremonies and to exploit them for their policies. The Norwegian kings took control of the ceremony of royal coronation by integrating the religious ceremony into a structure of profane banquets and festivities shaped to enhance their prestige and new authority. 13th-century Norway saw also kings regaining their initiative in the control over the ritual of king-taking, making it a decisive instrument in the consolidation of dynastic succession.

Throughout its development, the communication system of the Norwegian kings accompanied the consolidation of royal power and authority, and provided the kingship with the means to legitimize it. In this study, we have focused on the analysis of the tools for transmission of ideas more than on the ideas themselves. This bias is due to the perceived need to address a gap in current research on the origins of the modern state in Norway, while the ideology of the Norwegian kingship is well documented. As our examination has shown, the communication system of the Norwegian kingship was only used to justify the traditional prerogatives of the state, such as the king's right to collect taxes, to judge or to control the military, to a limited extent. At times some arguments were developed to precisely legitimize these issues, but on the whole, the communication system of the king was used to diffuse norms and values legitimizing the general right of monarchs to dominate society and to transform it according to their wishes.

The manufacturing of consent and adhesion to the royal project addressed a new type of audience. Habermas and Genet have emphasized the constitution of a political audience as a precondition to the modern state.¹ We must admit that such an audience certainly did not exist in the 13th century. Yet we have seen that the audience of royal communication evolved during the period. While King Sverre's propaganda essentially addressed a popular audience, 13th-century kings had no need of a communication policy towards their humblest subjects. Clearly, the affirmation of the state aimed primarily at the Norwegian elite and the system of communication addressed the aristocratic elite and the population of their towns.

Finally, the nature of royal control, as extensive it was, was not monopolistic. State-making in the Middle Ages was not a top-down process, but one of

1 Habermas 1991; Genet 2003.

interaction. Besides highlighting the centrality of Norwegian kings in the development of royal communication, this study has also sought to nuance the role of kings and underscore the active participation of other groups of society. This concerns first and foremost the Norwegian aristocracy, who were integrated into the political audience while also becoming active actors of royal communication. Aristocratic involvement in the production of communication could also evade royal control. Despite the scarcity of available sources, we have suggested the role of the nobility in the introduction and adoption of European literary culture in Norway on their own initiative. The demands of the nobility also constituted a major element in the strategies of the Norwegian kings and in the forms of their communication. The second actor with whom the Norwegian kings had to deal with was of course the Church. While the institution of the Church became less obviously involved in the communication of the Norwegian kings, clerics remained omnipresent at every level of the royal communication system. The plurality of actors involved in the communication of kings was both a decisive source of dynamism and a limitation. In any cases, it played a decisive role in the shaping of the system of communication.

The formation of the communication system of the Norwegian kings did not develop in a vacuum, but unfolded in changing contexts and involved different processes.

First, it has become clear that this system developed in close interaction with the socio-political and cultural context of the 12th and 13th centuries. We have distinguished three distinct phases which unfolded through different contexts. The civil war (1130–1240) and the period of political stability that followed as well as the gradual opening up of Norwegian society to European culture, first under the aegis of the Church and then through the kingship, determined the pace and character of the emergence of political communication in Norway.

The first phase corresponded to the emergence of the Church's communication system. The growth of ecclesiastic power from the mid-12th century onwards was accompanied by the introduction of new technologies and new means of communication. It was marked by the first serious development of a written culture in the kingdom and the successful introduction of new rituals and ceremonies of kingship. These ceremonies could be completely new, such as royal coronations, or the result of religious syncretism (*konungstekja*). Although the immediate benefits of these developments for the communication of kings were not spectacular, this phase was to be decisive as it established the framework on which the future royal communication system was to develop. Furthermore, besides the introduction and development of new

media, the period was marked by the founding of a new relationship of power between the kingship and the Church which also would be significant. As we have seen, these enterprises were first and foremost the doings of the bishops of the new church province of Nidaros and largely escaped royal control and influence. Under the reign of King Magnus Erlingsson (1163–1184), the context of the civil war and of competition for the throne led to an alliance between the church and the kingship. The relationship was complementary, each partner using its competency and power for the sake of mutual consolidation. However, the separation of roles was strict and although the crown benefited from new means to affirm its legitimacy, it was largely kept away from the control and execution of these new means. Nonetheless, however limited the gains proved to be for the king, the new system quickly became irreplaceable.

The two succeeding phases – the reign of King Sverre (1184–1202) and the long 13th century – followed the irruption into and the growing involvement of kings in the making of a communication system which we can term “royal.” It corresponds to the moment when the process of state-building accelerated. Not that progress was particularly astonishing. At its inception, the context of power struggle it was not conducive. The political instability with which kings were confronted, territorial partitioning and the division of loyalties interfered with the development of institutions of communication. However, it is precisely this same context that was to prove fertile in the affirmation of kings in their communication.

The reign of King Sverre marks the first breach of the monopoly of the Church and the beginning of a transfer of authority over royal communication to the kingship. The communication system of the Norwegian kings emerged from the context of struggle that opposed King Sverre to the Norwegian clergy. Its first manifestation as an autonomous system took the form of war propaganda. Sverre's need to legitimize his authority brought about the exploitation of words, written or spoken, as well as gestures and postures as weapons of persuasion. This coercive character of royal communication in the making corresponded to the very character of royal power. The king's authority and exercise of power still largely rested upon his use of coercive means and military power. To a great extent, under King Sverre royal authority was won and secured on the battlefield. It is thus not surprising that the king asserted his role in political communication much as he conquered fortresses – through daring attacks or cunning strategies. Forgeries of papal bulls, pungent pamphlets against blind bishops, ironical speeches over the grave of his enemies, and a consecration obtained by threat shaped the state communication of medieval Norway.

In a general manner this formative period helps us to reassess the relationship between coercion and persuasion in the state-building process. We have seen that Norwegian historiography has traditionally focused its attention primarily on warfare and violence in the formation of the state in medieval Norway. This study demonstrates that from an early stage, the kings of Norway developed tools of dialogue with society that represented credible and effective alternatives to war and the use of force. The example of war propaganda under King Sverre illustrates the interaction between physical violence, intimidation and strategies of persuasion. In a warlike context, royal communication becomes more reactive, flexible and direct, adapting to a changing political environment. It also demonstrates, if necessary, that spreading ideas and using persuasion were reliable instruments in the exercise of royal power in times of crisis. Finally, the analysis highlights another facet of the contribution of the civil war to the process of state-making. The war must not be considered exclusively as the scene of a political struggle from which a central power would emerge. It was also the stage for major cultural upheavals and developments that marked the end of a pre-state culture and the beginning of a new paradigm of political culture.

The reign of King Sverre was followed in 1202 by a period of greater political stability, which provided a favorable ground for kings to consolidate their grip on communication. Even though the civil war was not over until 1240, after 1202 it entered a phase with fewer actual combats and greater periods of peace. Particularly after the agreement between the two main parties in 1217 and the election of King Håkon Håkonsson in 1218, royal authority was so strongly established that it was almost never seriously affected by the last upheavals of the war. More peaceful conditions at home enabled the kingship not only to reinforce its authority over society, but also to develop ambitions outside the realm of Norway. The conjunction of these two elements was to be decisive in the genesis of the communication system in the 13th century. It determined the stakes for communication, but also provided kings with new opportunities to achieve them.

The return of domestic stability affected the balance of power in communication between the Norwegian kingship and the Church. As it has become clear, the Norwegian clergy, whether consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, drew substantial benefits from the struggle for power for the royal throne, asserting its power and defending its political interests. The peace agreement of 1202 not only sensibly appeased the intensity of the struggle, but more particularly signified the beginning of a progressive political disengagement of the church from the strategies of royal legitimation. The collaboration of Archbishop Eystein's time was not renewed after the destructive interlude

of King Sverre. The kingship filled the gap left by the church to break the ecclesiastical monopoly and strengthen its own involvement in communication.

The decades of the civil war had lastingly transformed the relationship between the kings and the Norwegian aristocratic elite. The affirmation of royal power entailed the strengthening of aristocratic loyalty. The integration of the *hirð* in the communication system of the kings was to be central in the 13th century.

Furthermore, with peace at home, the Norwegian kings turned their attention to the world outside the realm of Norway and were finally able to access European cultural dynamism. The intense diplomatic activity of kings like Håkon Håkonsson encouraged the interconnections with foreign courts and favored transfers of vernacular culture. Much less subject to Church control than Latin, the vernacular imposed itself as a new channel for the Norwegian kings' royal communication. The introduction of courtly literature stimulated local literary production and the development and exploitation of new local structures of production. In particular, it supported the construction of a court around the king built on the model of foreign monarchs, which was to become the main stage for royal communication. These processes had a political dimension. If they were not the doing of the kings alone, they nonetheless clearly cast the kings as decisive actors in Norwegian literary culture, who used their power and wealth for the peaceful activity of art patronage. Moreover, this literary culture provided the aristocracy with models of conduct that were pervaded with new norms and values beneficial to the kings. The opening up of Norway to Western European culture also favored the introduction of new standards for public celebrations of power. During the post-war period, rituals of kingship developed into pivotal moments in the exaltation of royal authority, matching the splendor and solemnity of their foreign counterparts.

The present examination has highlighted how the kingship fostered the development of a political communication system alongside different processes of appropriation and control over means of communication. This development was intimately related to the Church and its communication system. After a period of total dependency followed one in which the Norwegian kings emancipated their communication from the political domination of the Church but still were greatly dependent upon its means of communication. Finally, the development of the communication system of the 13th-century kings confirmed the crown's direct exploitation of communication for its own political purposes and saw the onset of cultural emancipation. One of the lessons of this study is that the communication systems of the Norwegian crown and of the Church were interwoven, and that this intermingling largely

determined the strategies deployed by the Norwegian kingship to control the means of communication.

As a reflection of their political relations, the communication of kings and of the clergy veered between total collaboration and fierce competition. Although the narrative of this study traces the crown's conquest of its own means of legitimation, the church retained extensive control over elements of communication on which kings remained largely dependent. Indeed, the kingship could not totally avoid a certain form of dependency. The Church's symbolic capital, the importance of religion in rituals and ceremonies as well in literature, was an inherent element in the legitimation of the modern kingship. The communication system of the monarchy thus developed in constant tension between dependency on and emancipation from the ecclesiastical system.

The modalities of royal control illustrate another form of dependency on the Church. While the Norwegian kingship claimed a more autonomous legitimacy, its communication system developed on premises defined by the Church. Many of the elements consolidating royal control in the 12th and 13th centuries were built on the model of the Church. To a large extent, kings' appropriation of the means of communication copied the strategies developed by the Church in making its own system. The royal communication system did not develop by eliminating the communication system of the Church, but in integrating it through variegated processes of transfer, substitution and appropriation.

Let us now address in detail the appropriation processes developed by the kings. As we have seen, the period of the civil war corresponded with the establishment of the communication system of the Church. It saw the Norwegian clergy developing new rituals of kingship (crowning), "sacralizing" traditional ones (*konungstekja*), "clericalization" of processions (*occursus*), and the exploitation of some for political purposes (trial by ordeal). This process increasingly bestowed great authority over royal succession upon the bishops. It was achieved through the introduction of religious liturgy into the staging of the rituals and ceremonies: liturgical chants, the processions of clerical orders as well as the use of relics and regalia. The performance of the bishops, often enhanced through the liturgy, was also increasingly central to the execution of the rituals. Moreover, the unmatched literary competency of clerics gave the church a decisive position both in literary production, as intermediates for foreign written culture and ideas, and in the control over centers of culture. The written and ritualistic elements of the Church's communication system revolved around a pivotal center: the Cathedral of Nidaros. Finally, the words, signs and images of kingship that the church cultivated conveyed a specific

conception of kingship that fitted in with the political ambitions of the Norwegian clergy.

Every element of this model was to be found in the making of the royal communication system, albeit with some variations. Against the processes of "clericalization" and "sacralization" of rituals, we can point to similar processes of "royalization," that is, the imposition of specifically royal elements.

In the course of the 12th and 13th centuries, the Norwegian kings increased their control over rituals and ceremonies in merging profane celebrations with the religious ceremony. The preparation meetings and banquets and feasts which were arranged in the wake of coronations integrated rituals for meals, seating arrangements, the display of regalia and speeches, all capitalizing on the consecration's symbolic power to exalt royal authority and make it an instrument of political power. The examination of rituals and ceremonies of kingship have also highlighted the role of public processions (*konungstekja*, funerals, Solemn Entries) as decisive elements of royal display. Royal processions composed of kings and their agents were structured on the ecclesiastic model. They responded to the clerical processions of bishops and members of the clergy to develop a symbolic dialectic, which in practice saw them meeting and merging into a single unit. Lastly, the use of liturgy in rituals as elements emphasizing clerical power also corresponded to the development of ritualized norms of behavior through codes of conduct regulating not only communication at court, but also in the rituals of kingship (royal banquets, processions, kings in majesty).

The processes of integration are also evident in the appropriation of the means of written communication. While the 12th-century Norwegian bishops embodied the values of learning and knowledge, the 13th-century kings increasingly incarnated the ideal of the learned prince whom the aristocracy could seek to emulate. Similarly, like their ecclesiastic counterparts, Norwegian kings consolidated their control over the written word through their activity of royal patronage, which positioned them as decisive intermediaries in the transfer of foreign culture. The dependency on the literate competency of clerics never diminished during our period. However, the growth of a contingent of clerics in royal service from the reign of King Håkon Håkonsson onwards and the creation of the royal chapels by the end of the 13th century illustrate the transfer of competency from the Church to the crown.

Finally, the structures of communication production developed by the Norwegian kings in the 13th century largely followed the principles of centralization developed by the church. Like the ecclesiastic court, the royal court became an important link in the chain of communication with local and foreign culture centers, channeling competency and knowledge. Furthermore,

the concentration of *loci* of production of written and ritualistic royal communication in operation in the 13th century closely resembled those of the church. The foundation of a royal necropolis and the designation of coronation churches in Bergen both undermined the political ascendancy of Nidaros and unfolded according to ecclesiastic cultural premises.

These remarks lead us naturally to conclude with a European perspective on the development of the communication system of the Norwegian kings in the High Middle Ages. Despite Sophia Menache's argument that "the emergence of political communication was a process *sui generis* and, as such, prevents synchronic research,"² I see clear reasons to draw parallels with other European regions. True, as we have emphasised above, the specific cultural and political context makes the Norwegian case unique. The "European model" was confronted with pre-existing rituals of kingship, ideas and norms for power legitimisation, and written culture, all particular to the Norse heathen culture and mentality. Nevertheless, the structures of the communication system of Norwegian kings were no different to those of the main systems in France and England. Indeed, by the end of the 13th century, by its extent and character, the communication system of Norwegian kings fully matched that of the great western monarchies. Somehow, the extent of kings' control may well have surpassed the French and English kings'. This is indeed no oddity as, like the "state project" in itself, from its very inception the Norwegian communication system was largely an imported model fuelled by the integration of means of ritual and written communication through Church mediation and the increasing and constant cultural exchanges between the local and the European elites. Did not Earl Erling wish to crown his son as early as in 1163 so as to "also have a crowned king, as well as the Danes and Englishmen"?³

The role of war communication/propaganda in the making of the Norwegian system echoed the decisive role played by propaganda in the development of Western monarchic communication, for instance during the struggle for succession in Angevin England (1075–1225) or in the exploitation of the crusade theme by French and English kings during the Middle Ages.⁴ Moreover, like in medieval France and England, the royal communication system of the Norwegian kings emerged in association with the Church; an association that over time changed from close collaboration to competition. However, the development of the ecclesiastic system of communication within the context of the civil war and the active political interference of the local clergy and the

2 Menache 1990, 151.

3 *ME*, Ch. 21.

4 Menache 1990, 175–190.

recurrent conflicts throughout the thirteenth century probably shaped the formation of royal communication in Norway in a way unparalleled in the Western European context. As a result, the Norwegian kings would never have a St-Denis to supervise their ceremonies or the production of official histories.

One trait which sets the Norwegian situation apart from other countries is the condensation of the processes of formation of a royal communication. Only a century passed between the establishing of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53, which I see as the founding act of state communication, and the communication system which Norwegian kings enjoyed in the thirteenth century. By comparison, at the same time, Western monarchies like France and England, which are reckoned to be central instances in the making of the modern state, benefited in their communication of ecclesiastic structures, which had been established since the Early Middle Ages. Thus in many respects the Norwegian case shows pertinent similarities with countries at the periphery of Christianity. Like Norway, the polities of Central Europe, Hungary, Poland and Bohemia experienced the combined development of state-making and of the Church. These regions of Central Europe emerged as Christian kingdoms in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, establishing the territorialisation of local dynastic power over newly Christianised populations, and developing on the foundation of mixed pagan/Christian culture.⁵ Furthermore, as in Norway, religious change and the centralisation of power was a source of political instability, as seen for instance in Poland and Hungary in the eleventh century. Confronted with the same challenges within a quite similar political and cultural context, it would be interesting to see how these rulers coped with the legitimisation of their authority.

5 Berend, et al. 2013. *Central Europe in the High Middle Ages. Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, c. 900–c. 1300*. Cambridge University Press.

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